



THE CERULEAN

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www.ohiobirds.org info@ohiobirds.org

Quarterly Newsletter of the **Ohio Ornithological Society**: *Ohio's Birding Network*

THE WILDS WINTER RAPTOR EXTRAVAGANZA SATURDAY, JANUARY 17TH, 2009

from the EDITOR

In this issue of *The Cerulean*, Major Randel Rogers, a Galloway hometown hero and member of the OOS, is our featured Birder's Bio. No matter what your politics are, I hope you will be inspired by this Ohio soldier's tale and his "official newsletter of the unofficial unit naturalist". While proudly serving in Iraq with the Ohio Army National Guard, Randy is inspiring an entire military contingent and their families to appreciate nature in the Middle East and back home in Ohio. But Randy is a birder with *another* mission: protecting birds and "building bridges between Iraqi and US birders".

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Just like the Birders' Exchange Program which funds and supplies Central and South American scientists, educators, and conservationists with books and optics, Randy is spearheading a similar effort in Iraq.

Won't you please join the friends of Randy Rogers and help him "build bridges between Iraqi and US birders"? Send your contribution, designated for **OOS: Randy Rogers' Iraq Project**, to The Ohio Ornithological Society, P.O. Box 14051, Columbus, Ohio 43214.

We've raised nearly \$1870 so far. OOS members and Randy's friends generously donated \$870, and the OOS board unanimously voted to donate an additional \$1000. One-hundred percent of donations will help his noble effort. FYI, Randy donated to the OOS collection for the Latin American Birders' Exchange program before he was deployed overseas!

Ann Oliver
-Cincinnati

Mark your calendars and pull out your fleece! The OOS and the Wilds are hosting our fourth consecutive mid-winter foray to the fabulous winter birding mecca in Muskingum County. This year's Winter Raptor Extravaganza will feature views of *new* raptor perches. This past spring, OOS partnered with the Wilds and AEP to place American Kestrel nest boxes and raptor perches on the Wilds and on AEP ReCreation Lands in Muskingum, Noble, and surrounding counties.

At the Wilds, more than 10,000 acres of grassland provides abundant forage for those furry sausages with legs known as Meadow Voles. Raptors converge at the Wilds in great numbers to take advantage of the mammalian bounty. We expect Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Short-eared Owls, along with a number of other species of meat-eating predatorial birds. Kings of the sky are Golden Eagles. Last year, every participant got to see one. Several Golden Eagles have overwintered at the Wilds for at least nine years. Also possible is Northern Shrike, and this is the locale where a Prairie Falcon spent two winters.

Arctic-like temperatures and icy blasts of air don't deter the birds, and in years past the weather hasn't deterred the birders. Last year, about 130 people showed up and a good time was had by all. Even though this trip costs exactly nothing, we need to know who will be coming.

To reserve your spot, watch for a posting on the Ohio Birds listserv:
<http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/OHIO.html>
or check the OOS website homepage:
<http://www.ohiobirds.org/> and send an email to wilds@ohiobirds.org.

Jim McCormac
-Columbus

MIDNIGHT AT THE IRAQI OASIS: OOS MEMBER GUARDS BIRDS WITH OHIO NATIONAL GUARD

Last December, when I learned my Ohio National Guard unit was deploying to Iraq, I asked soldiers returning home from active duty if they had seen any birds. The answer was almost universally “No, I didn’t see *any* birds”. How could this be possible? Iraq is situated along major migration corridors, the base is adjacent to an oasis only a few miles from the Euphrates River, and wildlife concentrates at water sources. There must be birds!

An old adage says the military is just a reflection of society on a smaller scale. I decided soldiers, like most people, were just not *noticing* birds. So I went to Al Anbar Province with high hopes and immediately found birds. I average a life bird about every 1.5 days. Still, I was amazed people could cohabitate with Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters or European Rollers and never notice. I resolved to start a newsletter for my unit. Thus was born “Al Asad au Natural” which I publish “every two weeks... more or less”!

I encourage interest in nature and the environment by highlighting plants and animals found here. A regular feature called “Who’s Living Under My CHU?” spotlights creatures dwelling beneath our container housing units including Mediterranean House Geckos, Sand Vipers, and Golden Skinks. Another column, “Creature Feature”, ranges from Crested Porcupines, to Patas Monkeys, to Eurasian Collared-Doves. Whatever the topic, I try to relate it to something similar back home, especially birds. For example, as we watched young Eurasian Collared-Doves hatch around the base, I wrote about that species appearing in Florida in 1982, being sighted in Ohio in 2001, and breeding by 2007 in the Buckeye State. Lake Erie is mentioned when talking about migration. The 1914 death of the last Passenger Pigeon in captivity at the Cincinnati Zoo was used as an example of extinction. The icon bird of the OOS, the Cerulean Warbler, was accented to discuss habitat preservation.

My efforts have reached further than planned: in addition to expanding my distribution throughout our brigade of 3000 people, my articles are being picked up by other military papers across Iraq. I’ve also been interviewed by

The New York Times regarding the link between nature observation and stress reduction among troops.

Even more rewarding, our family support group has been getting each issue. Many family members say reading “Al



Little Crake. Photo courtesy Randy Rogers.

Asad au Natural” makes them feel more connected to their deployed soldier. Children have taken copies to school, I hope not as their homework assignment! I’m trying to obtain field guides on mammals, trees, flowers and birds of the Middle East for our MWR (Moral, Welfare, Recreation) Office. Lots of personnel have questions about our natural surroundings but I have limited resources for answers.

I’ve been making inroads in conservation, too. I’ve been in contact with Nature Iraq and the Ornithological Society of the Middle East. Nature Iraq is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) trained by Birdlife International and charged with restoring the southern marshes in Iraq. You may recall, Saddam Hussein drained and cultivated 90% of these wetlands in an attempt to destroy the culture of the opposing Iraqi people who lived there. Endemic birds like the Basra Reed Warbler were gravely threatened by this destruction of habitat. Many feared salinization resulting from drainage and agriculture might make the marsh destruction irreversible. Thankfully, through much hard work, a significant portion of these globally important wetlands are recovering.

With that in mind, I have taken on two additional causes. The first is to do what I can to assist Nature Iraq. I’m working to channel support to them in the form of Arabic language field guides and possibly new or used field equipment. Secondly, there are several Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Iraq. The lead ornithologist with Nature Iraq has invited me to assist in surveying northern Iraqi IBA’s this winter. The main equipment need for Nature Iraq is ‘live traps’ of various sizes from rodent to small mammal for IBA field studies across Northern Iraq.



Randy birding in Iraq.

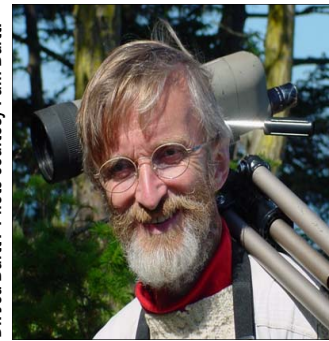
Meanwhile, I’m giving as much time as possible to survey the nearby oasis, palm grove, and wadi of Al Asad in order to assemble a local IBA application packet.



Randy's newsletter Al-Asad au Natural

CONGRATULATIONS TO OWU'S DR. JED BURTT: NEW AOU PRESIDENT

The oldest organization in the New World devoted to the



Dr. Jed Burtt. Photo courtesy Pam Burtt.

scientific study of birds has an Ohio professor at the helm. Congratulations to Dr. Edward (Jed) H. Burtt, Jr. the new President of the American Ornithologists' Union. Founded 125 years ago, the AOU is primarily an organization for professional ornithologists, but it embraces more than 3500

members including students, birders, and other conservationists dedicated to the advancement of ornithological science.

Dr. Jed Burtt is a professor in the Department of Zoology and co-chair of the Honors Program at Ohio Wesleyan University. For more than 30 years, he's been inspiring ornithology students on the Delaware campus. Burtt also works to preserve and protect habitat in Ohio by chairing the National Audubon-Ohio Important Bird Area committee. He's a past-president of the Wilson Ornithological Society (1997-1999) and currently writing a book on Alexander Wilson, the father of American Ornithology. Burtt is a member of the OOS and will serve as AOU President through 2010.

Dr. Burtt said the following about his life of birding: I think of birds from three different perspectives: initially and still the perspective of a birder, later the perspective of a bird watcher, and over the last 40 years that of an ornithologist. The perspectives blend into one another, but are also somewhat different. As a boy, I was very eager to find birds, eager to add another species to my life list. This passion introduced me to a lot of adults interested in birds and taught me a lot about their biology. I learned how to identify the birds of Massachusetts where I grew up, I learned about seasonal movements of birds, about song, and all the biology that is necessary to identify the common and rare species of one's surroundings. Gradually, the passion to find birds expanded into a passion to *really watch birds*. For one thing, I had been sufficiently successful at birding that I did not have many life birds left to see in Massachusetts, but I still wanted to be outdoors looking at birds. I began to study them, their behavior, and their migratory and nesting patterns. I conducted breeding bird censuses under the guidance of Charlotte Smith, who worked with Massachusetts Audubon and mentored me during high school.

A wadi is a ditch or valley eroded into the ground by running water from heavy seasonal rains. Wadis are important seasonal wetlands providing habitat for a variety of birds and animals. This area has some protection stemming from the belief that biblical Abraham visited the oasis. But as our base expands it encroaches on the wadi to the edge of the oasis. Four of the 52 species I have recorded here merit possible protection (Pallid Harrier, European Roller, Desert Lark, Iraq Babbler) as does the unique habitat which forms a migrant trap in spring and summer. Additionally, the near-threatened or possibly endangered Striped Hyena has been observed.

I have found Iraq to be a country with unique natural and historic attributes, many of which are understudied and not protected by the former regime. Iraqi's have a cultural appreciation for their history and natural heritage. A great opportunity for success is possible if groups like Nature Iraq can become influential as a new government and new economy continue to grow.

Major Randal Rogers, Logistics Officer
-Al Anbar Province, Iraq



Al Asad Oasis.
Photo courtesy Randy Rogers.

Editor's Note: MAJ Rogers is a Logistics Officer with the 371st Sustainment Brigade. His unit monitors and coordinates all logistics in the Al Anbar Province, roughly an area the size of Texas. He lives in Galloway, Ohio and has been a member of OOS since its inception. At home, he works full-time for the Ohio Army National Guard and volunteers with the Franklin County MetroParks.

Although serving in a brigade of three thousand, Randy Rogers is a *birding* army of one. With your help, the OOS is raising funds to supply Randy's brigade with *Birds of the Middle East* field guides: he also needs books on mammals, trees, and flowers of the region. Meanwhile, Randy hopes to assemble a 'care package' of used binoculars, digital cameras, live animal traps, and field guides for Iraqi birders.

Best of all, the new field guide *Birds of Iraq*, in Arabic, is now available through The Ornithological Society of the Middle East: <http://www.osme.org/osme/sales.html>. Randy hopes to purchase several copies for Iraqi birders. For information on current IBA's in the Middle East: http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/mideast_ibas/index.html.

Sign up for Randy's newsletter:
randel_rogers@hotmail.com.

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These censuses were published in Audubon Field Notes and I had the thrill of seeing my work (about a paragraph in length) in print.

I went to college where I was able to enroll in the ornithology course my freshman year, get an undergraduate research grant and study birds during the summer at a Bowdoin Scientific Station in the Bay of Fundy. That led to 4 more years studying Tree Swallows at the Station and a master's thesis. By then I was fascinated by the scientific study of birds. In 1970 I attended my first international meeting and my first AOU meeting in 1972. The science was endlessly fascinating and challenging; there were many questions to explore and I have been passionately committed to the study of ornithology since freshman year. But I still bird. Just this year there were the Black-necked Stilts at Big Island in May, the Black Rail (a lifer) near Chillicothe, and the first sighting of a Greater Shearwater off the Oregon coast this summer on an AOU field trip. That's the boy that will always be part of what I love about birds.

I still love to *watch* birds, White-throated Sparrows double-scratching under our feeders, and I love to try to figure out how birds do what they do. It's all part of a life with birds.

Editor's Note: The OOS thanks Dr. Jed Burt for his contribution to this article and his life-long dedication to birds.

FOR BETTER BIRDS OR FOR WORSE: OOS COUPLE CONFIRMS PAIR BOND



Newlyweds Tom and Jackie Bain.

Like swans and petrels, two members of the OOS have formed a lifetime pair bond. Congratulations to Jackie Bain (formerly Brown) of Galena and Tom Bain (formerly of Chillicothe) who exchanged wedding vows in July. Birding brought the couple together, but they initially met through the central and southern Ohio Boy Scouts Council on Conservation: Jackie serves as committee chair.

Professionally, Jackie is Education Coordinator for Preservation Parks of Delaware County. The new Mrs. Bain will still be "Miss Jackie" to school children throughout the park system, nature camps, and "Hands On The Land" which is an environment education program for fourth graders and their teachers. Professionally, Tom is an independent contractor providing ecological services.

He's a founding member of The Scioto Valley Bird and Nature Club, the compiler of the Beaver Valley Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for 17 years since inception, a veteran of nearly 50 CBC's, and an occasional blogger presenting natural history through the eyes of geology (www.ohiogeologyandbiodiversity.blogspot.com). Tom is the OOS Conservation Committee Chair. Jackie is a Columbus Audubon board member. The couple jokes it's "birdingly ever-after, through rain and snow and 20 below". The OOS wishes them years of happiness as numerous as spring warblers at Magee Marsh.

NOMINATION OF OOS BOARD MEMBERS

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Four of the thirteen positions on the Ohio Ornithological Society board of directors expire at the 2009 annual meeting next May. We are seeking nominations from the OOS membership to fill these posts. Candidates should be members in good standing of the OOS. Board members are expected to attend quarterly board meetings and the annual meeting, make an effort to participate in other OOS events, and help spearhead various OOS initiatives.

The upcoming vacancies are:

RECORDING SECRETARY (Term from 2009 - 2012). Nominees can reside anywhere in Ohio

NORTHWEST REGIONAL DIRECTOR (Term from 2009 - 2011). Nominees must live in one of the following counties, which are represented by this post: Allen, Crawford, Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Hancock, Hardin, Henry, Huron, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Putnam, Sandusky, Seneca, Van Wert, Williams, Wood, Wyandot.

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL DIRECTOR (Term from 2009 - 2011). Nominees must live in one of the following counties, which are represented by this post: Adams, Auglaize, Brown, Butler, Champaign, Clark, Clermont, Clinton, Darke, Greene, Hamilton, Highland, Logan, Mercer, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, Shelby, Warren.

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL DIRECTOR (Term from 2009 - 2011). Nominees must live in one of the following counties, which are represented by this post: Athens, Belmont, Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Vinton, Washington.

Please submit suitable candidates' names and addresses by February 1st, 2009, with their permission, to: OOS, P.O. Box 14051, Columbus, OH 43214 or via e-mail to: info@ohiobirds.org.

LAKE ERIE RAPTOR SEMINAR

Nearly 140 raptor enthusiasts packed the conference room at Maumee Bay State Park for the Lake Erie Raptor Seminar on Saturday, September 27th. The event was jointly sponsored by OOS and Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) and coordinated by OOS board member Karen Menard, Manager of Environmental Programs for Toledo Metroparks. Maumee Bay State Park Naturalist Dana Bollin, another OOS board member, served as emcee. Four lectures enlightened attendees during the morning session. Afternoon field trips included Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area, Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, and Maumee Bay State Park: boxed lunches were served at each field trip meeting site.



Field trip to Ottawa NWR. Photo courtesy Ann Oliver.

Between field trips and dinner, the wildlife education center BACK TO THE WILD displayed their program birds and answered questions about injured raptors. Saturday evening's keynote speaker was artist and photographer Brian Wheeler of Colorado. Brian is author of Peterson Field Guides®: *Hawks* and *A Photographic Guide to North American Raptors*.

Sunday's field trip was a journey just across the Ohio border to Michigan's Lake Erie Metropark, one of the top ten raptor migration locations in the Western Hemisphere.

The first speaker Saturday morning was Wildlife Biologist Mark Shieldcastle from Ohio Division of Wildlife. Shieldcastle also volunteers as Director of Research for BSBO. He updated attendees on the Bald Eagle, the most protected bird in the world. From a nadir of four breeding pairs in 1979, Ohio tallied 184 nests producing 222 young in 2008. Shieldcastle says research is now looking at habitat used by fledglings: this important time of new-found independence has a high mortality rate. Studies are finding a bottleneck of habitat used by young Bald Eagles. An extreme example of limited territory includes a woodlot where 100 eagles were once observed leaving an overnight roost. Marine traffic by

boaters and fisherman near sensitive fragmented woodlots contributes to additional human pressure.

The next speaker was Paul Cypher, Lake Erie Metropark (LEMP) interpreter and hawk-watcher, who talked about fall migration in Southern Michigan. Several factors contribute to high counts south of Detroit including geography, land mass characteristics forming a funnel effect, wind speed, wind direction, and flight preferences of different raptor species. Good migration weather such as rising barometric pressure and light northerly winds combined with patchy clouds contribute to a good count day. Just how good? On September 18th, just 10 days before the symposium's field trip, the LEMP Hawkwatch tallied 256,163 birds of 13 species. More than 255,000 of those were Broad-winged Hawks: 130,000 Broad-wings were seen between 4-5 pm.

Next up at the podium was Steve Lauer, coauthor of *Birds of the Toledo Area*, who also helps coordinate the Oak Openings Raptor Research Project. The Oak Openings, dubbed "One of the 200 Last Great Places on Earth" by The Nature Conservancy, is a remnant of glacial deposits of moraine, clay sediment, and ancient beach ridges. In the 2008 breeding season, 29 of 36 raptor nests were on private land. The nests of Cooper's Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, and Broad-winged Hawks were often found along power lines, sidewalks, or horse trails.

The final lecture of the morning brought Mark Shieldcastle back to the lectern to discuss spring hawk migration at Magee Marsh. For the last 17 years, migrating raptors have been studied at count sites dispersed along the western basin of Lake Erie to help land managers make informed decisions. The tower platform near the large visitor parking lot at the Magee Marsh Sportsman Migratory Bird Center has the best diversity in spring.

Lake Erie Metropark Michigan. Photo courtesy Jim McCormac.



Lake Erie Metropark Michigan. Photo courtesy Jim McCormac.



LEMP Hawkwatcher Paul Cypher shares tips with the crowd. To the left are Elaine Kunka of Akron and Sherrie Duris of Oregon. Photo courtesy Ann Oliver.

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The keynote speaker Saturday evening was Brian Wheeler of Colorado. Before dinner, Wheeler autographed copies of his raptor books: the book signing line wrapped around in two directions in the hallway! During his presentation, attendees were treated to a preview of a current book in progress featuring his exquisite paintings. But Wheeler's raptor photography was the focus of the evening. A few tricks of the raptor photography trade were shared including his full ensemble of camouflage and head-to-toe netting as well as a plastic Great Horned Owl outfitted with turkey feathers and soft ears fashioned from pipe fittings. Fine points of raptor identification were covered such as the dark spikes seen in the tip of tail feathers in Harlan's Hawks. Wheeler also mingled with the crowd Sunday morning, generously sharing insight and knowledge, while enjoying his first visit to LEMP.

Ann Oliver
-Cincinnati

Editor's Note: Cheryl Harner's Flora and Butterfly Blog, also known as the Weedpicker's Journal, snapped a great photo capturing the athleticism demonstrated at the Sunday morning field trip. Harner's blog commented on the group posture: "Behold the veritable congo line of future chiropractic patients at the Lake Erie Raptor Conference. If you think spring warbler watching can put a kink in the neck, you'll have to admire the determination of this group of potential "Raptor Back" victims. Looking straight overhead to sort "coopers" from "sharpies" the steadfast OOS and BSBO birders showed the stuff we are made of! No sissys in this group! Their "rapt" attention is given to counting the carnivores of the sky- RAPTORS!" Link to Cheryl's blog: <http://www.flora-quest.com/blog.html>.



Lake Erie Metropark Michigan. Photo courtesy Cheryl Harner.

A VOICE FOR GRASSLAND BIRDS

On the site where The Voice of America once broadcast to the world, an ad hoc group now speaks for the preservation of grassland birds and park officials are listening! The Voice of America Park (VOA) is roughly a 525-acre tract of land located midway between Cincinnati and Dayton. The park was the site of a former US government radio transmission station from 1943 to 1994.

The majority of VOA is a mosaic of grasslands with scattered athletic fields. It's one of the few places in Southwest Ohio supporting breeding habitat for Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Blue Grosbeaks, and sporadic Sedge Wrens. Each spring, Jon Dunn takes WINGS birding participants to the VOA. Although the Henslow's eluded the bird tour this past May, Dunn remarked the displaying Bobolinks were spectacular. VOA also supports wintering Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers. This suite of birds was responsible for the VOA's Important Bird Area (IBA) designation.

Recently, a strong contingent sought to have the entire site developed into athletic fields. But a group of birders (John Ritzenthaler, Mike Busam, Sam Fitton, and Jeff Brown) are actively partnering with the Butler County MetroParks to manage and maintain the "High Meadow" grassland. The four birders formed an ad hoc group, *The Conservation Partnership for the VOA Grasslands*, to request new athletic development be channeled to the periphery to maintain the core "High Meadow." A recently approved VOA enhancement plan preserves a large portion of acreage as natural grassland habitat.

To share the importance of VOA, the *Conservation Partnership* teamed with Butler County MetroParks for a one-day grassland bird workshop held this past June. Jon Granville, Executive Director of MetroParks of Butler County was in attendance. Dr. Danny Ingold, Professor of Biology at Muskingum College, discussed his research at the Wilds. Dave Nolin, Director of Conservation for Five Rivers MetroParks, discussed 20 years of grassland bird management at Five Rivers Metroparks in Dayton. Dr. Joe Robb, Refuge Manager for Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, discussed management and research of grassland birds and their habitat in Indiana. Paul Wharton, former president of the Cincinnati Bird Club, presented his efforts locally regarding kestrel box placement and banding in Southwest Ohio. An overview presented by Jeff Brown on grassland birds, habitats, and bird rarities occurring at the VOA concluded the event just in time for an afternoon bird walk.

Jeff Brown
-Mason

**DIAMOND JUBILEE
CELEBRATION HONORS
TNA'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY**

The Toledo Naturalists' Association (TNA) has been committed to the study of flora and fauna in Northwest Ohio for three quarters of a century. Founded in 1933 upon the merger of the Toledo Nature Study Society and the Toledo Field Naturalists' Association, TNA has played an integral part in land acquisition and habitat preservation in Northwest Ohio for 75 years.

TNA associates have been founding members of the Ohio Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, former presidents of America's three major ornithological societies, and organizers of the first Audubon Christmas bird count in Toledo. They have been instrumental in helping purchase and preserve local habitat including Kitty Todd Nature Preserve, Irwin Prairie, Oak Openings, and Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Our members have written extensively in local newspapers, published two editions of *Birds of the Toledo Area* and helped resurrect the state birding journal *The Ohio Cardinal*. They have been in the forefront of nature photography as well as leading authorities in botany and herpetology in our region. Our members have organized one of the finest Internet forums (<http://www.rarebird.org>) and produced one of the most entertaining rare bird alerts (419-877-9640) in the country.

Due to the generosity of members in the form of gifts and bequests, TNA has awarded scholarships to high school and college students, supported grants for local research, and donated monies for the purchase of land for natural habitat preservation. Over the past 2 years, we've donated \$525 from the Campbell fund to support youth education and donated \$1500 from the Mallory fund for college scholarships. The Mayfield fund has donated \$1000 in the past year to support research. In the last 10 years, TNA has donated \$130,000 to The Nature Conservancy for land acquisition.

TNA's gala year will be topped off with our annual banquet on Saturday, November 15th at The Toledo Zoo Indoor Theater. Pete Dunne, Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory and one of America's best-known birders, is our keynote speaker. Pete will join Kenn and Kim Kaufman on the Black Swamp Bird Observatory's Bird Bus for a fundraising 75th anniversary field trip for donors on Sunday morning.

Michael Gordon, President
Toledo Naturalists' Association
-Sylvania

**CSI: CHILlicothe
SAW-WHET INVESTIGATION
A STORY OF SEX, BLOOD, FEATHERS
AND LACK OF SLEEP**

Northern Saw-whet Owls are not the easiest birds to study. They breed in tree cavities in the boreal forest: if you spend months sleuthing from Alaska to Newfoundland through the forests of the Far North, you might find enough breeding pairs to research. In Ohio, at the Buzzard's Roost Banding Station west of Chillicothe, we give up much needed sleep from October through December in hopes of luring Northern Saw-whet Owls (NSWO) into our mist nets. It's worth the effort. We captured 132 NSWO in the fall of 2008 surpassing our combined total of 113 from the previous three years.

Last fall also marked the beginning of our owl DNA investigation. Nearly one-fourth (18 to 24%) of owls caught were of unknown sex. While there is a method to determine gender based on weight and wing length, there is an overlap range where birds cannot be accurately separated. In the lab, NSWO have been sexed using DNA extracted from a tiny amount of blood. I did some reading and found more than 30 species of birds had been sexed with feather DNA. Drawing a small amount of blood from a bird is uncomfortable but rather harmless, but plucking a few feathers would be even less invasive and easier for other researchers to do.



Northern Saw-whet Owl.
Photo courtesy William Bosstic.

In humans, males are heterozygous (XY). In birds, females are heterozygous (ZW) and males are ZZ. In the lab, you can take a drop of bird blood or the calamus from a feather, add a bunch of stuff, shake it, heat it, spin it, add more stuff, and eventually end up with some clear drops of liquid containing DNA in the bottom of your tube. A few more steps (running a polymerase chain reaction or PCR) and a couple hours later, you place a tiny drop in a small slot in a gel, run current through the gel and a little later you should have two bands for females and one band for males. This works well with most birds. But the problem with owls is the W and Z fragments are too close in size hence the bands don't show up well. Also, the reaction that works with other birds is not as effective with owls. So, I have not yet been able to sex a single owl with feather DNA from owls captured last year.

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OH SWEET CANADA, CANADA, CANADA!

But there *is* still hope to succeed with our Saw-whet Owl DNA investigation. The OOS has enabled me to make contacts to lead me in the right direction. The OOS brought Denver Holt of Montana's Owl Research Institute to Ohio a couple years ago to speak at the Owl Symposium. Holt put me in touch with Dr. Sandra Talbot, a U.S. Geological Survey Research Geneticist in Alaska.

Dr. Talbot informed me some owls cannot be sexed easily. She recommended using DNA from blood or tissue until we get the system down, then switch to feathers to sex the owls.

Currently I'm working on finding NSWOW blood or tissue samples. If needed, we'll collect blood this fall from the owls we catch. Hopefully, we'll get the system down soon and will be able to sex the tiny owls with a *single* feather.

No, *nothing* about studying saw-whets is easy, but it *is* worth it. The childlike look of wonder on the faces of children and adults alike the first time they see a saw-whet in the hand is rewarding.



Northern Saw-whet Owl.
Photo courtesy William Bosstic.

Hopefully, visitors gain appreciation for our natural world to make this a better place for humans and owls alike.

Kelly Williams-Sieg
-Chillicothe

Editor's Note: If you'd like to visit the fall migration station near Chillicothe, contact Kelly Williams-Sieg at kellyws@roadrunner.com and place "NSWO" or "saw-whets" in the subject. An additional note of thanks to OOS member Craig Caldwell who made a generous donation to help fund DNA research at the banding station: read about the Northern Saw-whet Owl Research Fund in the winter 2007-2008 issue of *The Cerulean* available online: <http://www.ohiobirds.org/publications/cerulean/past.php>.

Next time a White-throated Sparrow migrates through your yard or overwinters, give thanks to environmental legislation in Canada. Millions of boreal breeding birds, as well as steeply declining Rusty Blackbirds, and skulking Connecticut Warblers have a more secure future thanks to political leadership across Canada. This past July, Ontario Premier Dalton McGinty announced protection for half of Ontario's boreal forest.



The 55 million acres (or 225,000 square kilometers in metric system-speak, eh!) will be set aside as a pro-ecotourism conservation area but off-limits to mining, forestry, and energy exploration. Changes in antiquated mining laws and forestry practices were promised in addition to consideration of the needs of native peoples in Ontario's First Nations. In October, Quebec announced protection for nearly 4.4 million acres (18,000 square kilometers) as part of its Canadian Boreal Initiative.

This 'bird nursery of the north' is said to be half the size of Texas, equal to the state of Minnesota, or twice the size of Pennsylvania. Operating as a massive "carbon sink",



the Canadian boreal forest is the world's largest terrestrial carbon storehouse surpassing the smaller remaining swath of Brazilian Amazon forest. The Montreal Gazette quoted the Pew Environment Group's International Boreal Conservation Campaign as heralding Ontario's pledge as "one of the most significant conservation commitments on Earth".

Read more about the boreal forest on the Boreal Songbird Initiative website: <http://www.borealbirds.org/index.shtml>.

To see a list of boreal birds that migrate through or winter in Columbus, Ohio: http://www.borealbirds.org/birdguide/map_columbus.shtml.

Boreal nesting species White-throated Sparrow and Canada Warbler
Photos courtesy Ron Austing: <http://www.ronausting.com>.

WORKING ON THE YOUNG BIRDER'S GUIDE

In the middle of my 4th grade year, my dad, Bill Thompson III, came into our class and asked us to help him create a new bird book. The book would be aimed at young bird watchers—kids our age. It would be called *The Young Birder's Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. Our class decided to help him with this project.

So, for two and a half years, we studied the birds of eastern North America. My dad asked us to come up with a WOW fact (something interesting) for a bird of our choice. We also got to choose the profile photos for different species. The WOW fact I came up with was for the indigo bunting, about a study that showed how buntings use the sky to find their way around during migration.

There are a few pictures in the book of my brother and me that are a little embarrassing, such as me in the birding gear. That's now the joke between my classmates and me. We're all in 7th grade now.

Working with my dad was great. I liked that my friends got to see the un-generic side of my dad. He wasn't just the average sports-loving, tie-wearing father that you see today. He may be a birder, but he's also pretty cool and now my friends know that.

After all the work was done on the book it was sent back to the publisher in Boston. Then it went to the designer in London, England. Then back to Boston, then over to Asia to be printed. The printed books came over the Pacific Ocean on a ship and then on a truck to us in Ohio. It's cool that our little book went all the way around the world.



Phoebe Thompson and proud Dad.
Photo courtesy Ann Oliver.

My favorite part of the whole project was, of course, seeing the books come out of the box for the first time, and watching everyone's faces. By this time we were almost done with 6th grade. I felt so proud. Dad was obviously very happy, too. He asked the entire class to sign a copy of the book as a souvenir of the project.

A few weeks after we each got our own copy of the *Young Birder's Guide* we went to Pittsburgh for our sixth grade

class trip. While we were there, my dad set up a special tour through the National Aviary. There was a room where you could feed Rainbow Lorikeets by holding small cups of nectar in your hand. Watching them drink from a cup in my hand, I knew why my dad wrote the book. Birds are awesome!

Watching my dad inspires me to become a writer/birder, too. There are so many experiences that you would miss out on if you didn't take part. I'm proud of my class' role in creating this new book. And I'm pretty sure my dad is proud of me, too!

Phoebe Linnea Thompson
Age 12
-Whipple, Ohio

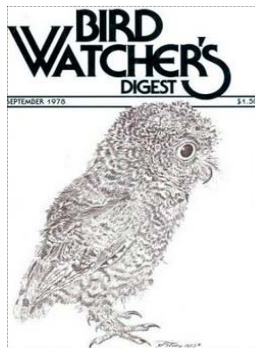
Editor's Note: To inspire your family's young birder, follow this link to The Young Birder's Guide including a Companion Guide available in either an iPod download or CD format: http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/shop/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=417

BIRDY, BIRDY, LOOK WHO'S THIRTY! BIRD WATCHER'S DIGEST MAGAZINE CELEBRATES MILESTONE

The world's premier birding magazine is based right here in the Buckeye State. That's right, *Bird Watcher's Digest* was founded in Marietta, and Ohio's oldest city remains its base of operations 30 years later.

In 1978, when BWD was launched, there were no models to follow. Popular perceptions of birdwatchers thirty years ago tended towards the impression of geekiness. No one had an idea how many avian enthusiasts roamed the landscape. Starting a magazine catering to birders took nerve back then.

Much to our good fortune, Bill and Elsa Thompson held a family meeting, mustered the offspring, and emerged with a familial green light to launch *Bird Watcher's Digest*. The inaugural issue of the bimonthly debuted in 1978, and the Thompsons have never looked back nor regretted their bold stroke.



That first issue featured a winsome drawing of an Eastern Screech-Owl by Ed Pitner whose wife was in Elsa's bird club.

This wonderful pencil sketch thus began the tradition of commissioning original artwork for each magazine cover.

Continued on Page 10

The most recent issue also is bedecked by another owl: artist Debby Kaspari's gorgeous rendering of a Long-eared Owl being investigated by a quizzical Rufous Hummingbird. The centerpiece article always showcases the species on the cover, and is interesting, informative, and penned by some of America's most knowledgeable birders.

BWD got a huge jumpstart in 1984, when the world's foremost birder, Roger Tory Peterson, began writing a column for the magazine entitled All Things Reconsidered. Roger had taken a shine to BWD from its inception and saw the tremendous potential in its pages. Other ornitho-wunderkinds have since joined the team: BWD readers are routinely treated to the words and musings of the likes of Kenn Kaufman, Alvaro Jaramillo, Julie Zickefoose, Connie Toops, and far too many others to name.

Now, as in 1978, the magazine remains family-owned and operated. Day to day leadership has passed to Bill and Elsa's three progeny: Bill III as editor, Andy as publisher, and Laura as circulation director. Founders Bill Jr. and Elsa remain very involved. In this day and age of automated voices and disconnected customer service, it is refreshing to call the BWD office in Marietta and have a live person (often Elsa) answer the phone!

Bill III (BT3 as he is popularly known) has supported the OOS literally since Day One as one of our inaugural board members. His contributions to the OOS have been invaluable. Birders who have attended our annual conferences or other events BT3 has emceed would likely agree he breathes lots of life into these affairs. Bill also has the distinction of being the very first to put his money where his mouth is: he was the first to pay his OOS dues and became member #1.

From humble beginnings, BWD has grown to become the premier birding enthusiast's magazine and sends copies all over the world. Words and images in the some 180 issues so far have inspired legions of birders, and served to interest untold numbers of people in the feathered world. Ohioans should be proud to be the home state of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Congratulations on your pearl anniversary, BWD, and here's to thirty more years!

Jim McCormac
-Columbus

Editors Note: By subscribing to BWD through the OOS website, the OOS receives a donation for each subscription. To date, we have raised nearly \$1,000 for

conservation and education thanks to this partnership. Thank you BWD! To learn more visit:
<http://www.ohiobirds.org/bwdfundraiser.php>



BWD staff outside their Marietta offices on July 31st, 2008. From left to right: Bill Thompson III, Helen Neuberger (hiding in the back), Susan Hill, Jim Cirigliano, Laura Thompson Fulton, Elsa Thompson, Bill Thompson, Jr, Ann Kerenyi, Andy Thompson, Linda Brejwo, Claire Mullen, Jamie Tidd, Emily Breen. Pokey the wonder dog is front center. Photo courtesy Jim McCormac.

OAK OPENINGS RAPTOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Your *rapt* attention is needed! Toledo Metroparks is looking for volunteers and property owners in the Oak Openings Region to monitor for nesting raptors. Volunteer training will occur January 17th, 2009. Surveying is facilitated through use of a spotting scope, binoculars, and by maintaining a safe distance: raptors and their nests are protected by federal and state laws.

Data obtained during the February through June monitoring period will help guide regional bird conservation efforts and will be added to the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas. For more information, contact Karen Menard of Toledo Metroparks at Karen.Menard@metroparkstoledo.com or at 419-461-4860 or email Steve Lauer: steven.lauer@yahoo.com or 419-509-2138.

MEMBERS' CORNER



Thank you for your donations!

We would like to thank and acknowledge the following members who have given generous donations. These donations have been deposited into the Ohio Ornithological Society's Conservation & Education Fund. These funds will be used towards promoting conservation, education and research of Ohio's avifauna. Thank you!

Delores Cole
Louis Marie McDonald

Welcome New Members!

We would like to welcome our new members who have joined us since our last issue:

Jeff Brown
David & Suzanna Edens
Anne Main
Deb Neidert
Ohio Bird Sanctuary
Butch & Beth Olds
Jane & Bob Scott
Wanda Smith
Alan Tarshis
Lori Trahan
Janet Yaniglos & Clyde Morris
Carol Zeh

Friends of Randy Rogers Iraq Project!

Thanks for your support!

Columbus Audubon
Columbus Dispatch
Diana Dugall
Paul Gardner
Jeff Grabmeier
Jen Sauter

Attendees at the Lake Erie
Raptor Seminar

THE CERULEAN

THE CERULEAN is the official newsletter of the Ohio Ornithological Society (OOS). THE CERULEAN is published four times a year. It contains timely information regarding upcoming field trips and meetings, recent bird sightings and current hot spots, trip reports, as well as other pertinent birding information. A subscription to THE CERULEAN is included among the benefits of the OOS. Members of the OOS are encouraged to contribute announcements, articles, photographs, drawings, and other birding related information to the newsletter. Seasonal deadlines for contributions to THE CERULEAN are as follows:

- Spring: 1 March
- Summer: 1 June
- Fall: 1 September
- Winter: 1 December

Send contributions for the newsletter to cerulean1@ohiobirds.org, or by regular mail to THE CERULEAN, c/o OOS, P.O. Box 14051, Columbus, Ohio 43214. For more information see the Publications page on the OOS web site at www.ohiobirds.org. Because the newsletter is sent as bulk mail, subscribers should remember that the Post Office will not forward this newsletter to a new address. **Please notify Andrea Cook at andrealcook123@yahoo.com if you have moved.**

Editor--Ann Oliver, Design Manager--Kathy McDonald

Calendar of Events

The Wilds: January 17th, 2009:

Watch for details on the Ohio Birds listserv: <http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/OHIO.html>

Rusty Blackbird Blitz: February 7-15, 2009

To gather a snapshot of wintering populations. Record flock size, foraging behavior, habitat, etc.

See Conservation Issues Forum on the Ohio Birding Forum:

<http://www.ohiobirds.org/forum/viewforum.php?id=16>

Oak Openings: May 16-17th, 2009

Our Fifth Annual Spring Event will feature visits to the Oak Openings Region including The Nature Conservancy's Kitty Todd Preserve, the Lake Erie marshes, and Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Details to be announced this spring!



Midwest Birding Symposium:

Lakeside, Ohio: September 17 -20, 2009

Save the date for The Midwest Birding Symposium sponsored by The Ohio Ornithological Society & Bird Watcher's Digest to be held at Lakeside, Ohio. Confirmed speakers include Julie Zickefoose, Alvaro Jaramillo, Kenn Kaufman, Lang Elliott, Jim McCormac, Arthur Morris,, Jane Alexander, Scott Weidensaul, and Bill Thompson III. Keep your eyes peeled to The Ohio Ornithological Society's and Bird Watcher's Digest (www.birdwatchersdigest.com) web site for announcements!

Ohio Ornithological Society Membership Application

For an online version of this application visit: www.ohiobirds.org/join.php



Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

(For electronic news updates)

\$ _____ Donation Amount - Yes I would like to make a one-time donation to help support OOS.

\$ _____ Membership Dues.

\$ _____ Total Payment Enclosed (Please make checks payable to OOS.)

How did you hear of OOS? _____

Are you interested in:

Volunteering? Distributing OOS flyers within your club or community?

- \$15 Student/Limited Income
- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family or Nonprofit
- \$100 Patron or Business
- \$250 Sustaining Member
- \$500 Benefactor
- \$1,000 Lifetime Benefactor

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OUR MISSION . . .
Welcoming backyard birdwatchers and researchers in the field alike, the Ohio Ornithological Society is the only statewide organization specifically devoted to fostering a deeper appreciation of wild birds, fellowship and collaboration in advancing our collective knowledge about them, and our ability to speak with one voice to preserve Ohio's bird habitats.

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