



Summer 2017 Vol. 14, No. 2

The Cerulean

Quarterly Newsletter of the Ohio Ornithological Society



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NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL | LAURA KEENE

From the Editor

Two thirds of the land in the 48 contiguous U.S. states is privately owned, much of it farmland and forest. More than 100 bird species rely heavily on habitat on privately owned land. For example, only 25% of Cerulean Warbler breeding habitat is on public land, while 75% is private. The North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI), a coalition of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and bird-focused partnerships has issued a Special 'State of the Birds' Report this summer. The reason for the report is an update to the Farm Bill due in 2018. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, one of the co-authors of the report, the Farm Bill provides incentives for ecologically beneficial land use practices that also maintain habitat for birds. These federal payments allow farmers to keep grasslands and wetlands out of crop production. It promotes forest management practices that enhance habitat for species such as Northern Bobwhite, Black-billed Cuckoo, or Wood Thrush. These crucial measures provide flood mitigation, groundwater recharge, and cleaner surface water that improves the condition of the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. Farm bill conservation programs also allow for scientifically informed input by nonprofits and states to optimize outcomes. And, negative population trends of wetland, grassland, and forest birds could be reversed or at least stabilized since 1990. Hopefully, the proposed major cuts to Farm Bill conservation programs will not be supported by Congress next year.

Stefan Gleissberg
ceruleaneditor@ohiobirds.org



Nesting, migration, and survival: Study of a state-threatened bird in Ohio

By Kristie A. Stein

As we pack the truck full of equipment for a day in the field, I remember to announce, "Don't forget your hat!" When working in a wading bird colony, especially one that has the nickname "Vomit Island", a hat is one item you don't want to forget. West Sister Island and Turning Point Island are home to the remaining strongholds of breeding *Black-crowned Night-Herons* in Ohio and are the study sites of my research at Ohio State University. Once out at the colony, be careful not to look up to the canopy for too long, or you may be pelted with poop or partially digested fish. Both parents and chicks will target anyone that approaches within a few feet of their nests as a type of defense mechanism. The idea is that the predator will turn its attention to the regurgitated meal instead of the prey. It works quite well, as I often find myself staring in surprise at the size of fish that dropped from a cormorant nest. Nests

of various sizes and structures can be found in every direction. Besides night-herons, these islands provide nesting habitat for *Great Blue Herons*, *Great Egrets*, *Double-crested Cormorants*, *Snowy Egrets*, and more. The islands are so brimming with life that it's exhilarating as well as exhausting to experience it. And while life is abundant on these islands, it's also fragile. Black Swamp Bird Observatory, in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ohio Division of Wildlife have monitored wading birds at West Sister Island for many years. During this time, populations have fluctuated and one species in particular, the *Black-crowned Night-Heron*, has declined so far as to be placed on the state threatened list for Ohio. With this research, we aim to understand the factors that may be limiting success of night-herons by studying them during the breeding season and continuing to track individuals during subsequent life stages.

Nest monitoring

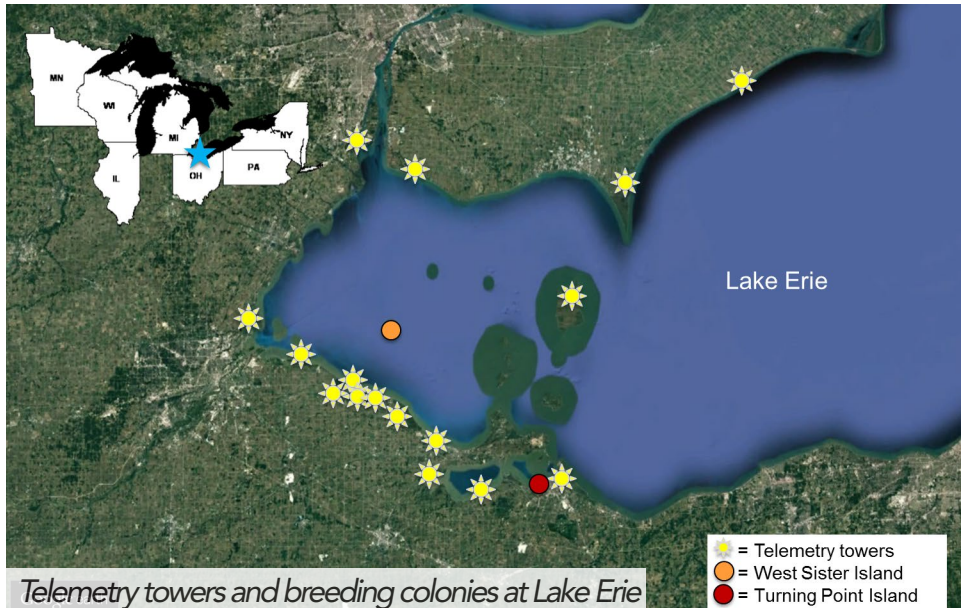
Upon the first visit to a breeding colony, we locate *Black-crowned Night-heron* nests and attach trail cameras to nearby trees to monitor them over the course of the season. We use the photos from these cameras to calculate parental feeding rates, identify predation events, and determine causes of failure at each nest. Once chicks hatch, we hand capture them twice during the period before they are old enough to fledge. During these checks, we collect measurements such as wing

lab, and sort through them. From these samples, we have identified a wide variety of prey items including fish, frogs, crayfish, and invertebrates. On the second nest check, we fit one chick with a radio transmitter. These transmitters have a harness that fits around the hips of the bird with the tag resting on the lower back just like a backpack would. By the end of the 2016 season, we banded a total of 127 chicks and tagged 60 of those with radio transmitters. Out of the birds marked with radio transmitters, 80% on West Sister Island and

each emit a unique pulse. Because each tag transmits on the same frequency, we can use telemetry towers to passively monitor our birds. In collaboration with Bird Studies Canada, our research group monitors 12 towers along Lake Erie in Ohio and Michigan. These towers are part of a much larger array located throughout the Western Hemisphere monitored by many researchers and organizations (see map at motus.org). If one of our tagged night-herons passes within about 15 km of a tower, the date, time, and tag identification number will



Fledgling night-heron with colorband



Telemetry towers and breeding colonies at Lake Erie

and bill length that we can later use to determine the growth rate of each individual chick. While taking measurements, the chicks will often puke right into your lap. This makes things quite smelly, but also gives us a perfect opportunity to learn more about the diet the parents are feeding the chicks. We collect the samples, take them back to the

75% on Turning Point Island successfully fledged from the islands.

Tracking technology

For this research, we are using three types of technology: radio transmitters, automated telemetry towers, and satellite transmitters. The radio transmitters that we fit to chicks are small, 5 gram, and

be recorded and stored on a solar powered telemetry receiver. The amazing part about this system is that if our birds – or tagged individuals of another species – pass near any of the 560 towers that make up the entire array, we will be notified and vice versa if we detect other species on our towers.

continued on page 4



The radio transmitters are a great resource for studying local movements near nesting colonies. Because the tower array is not evenly distributed across North America, migratory movements can not be consistently followed. We decided to use satellite transmitters to track the migratory movements of adult night-herons in this population. These transmitters are different from radio transmitters in that they communicate with Argos satellites orbiting the earth, store the signals, and relay them back to Earth in real-time. We can then download the data from the Argos website while having our morning coffee. The data contain information on the latitude and longitude of each bird along with a time and date for each transmission.

Post-fledging survival and movements

By tagging nestling night-herons with radio transmitters, we aim to investigate how conditions experienced within the nest carry-over to influence survival during the post-fledging stage. From August to November, we locate tagged fledglings once every 13 days using a combination of hand

tracking, aerial telemetry, and the automated telemetry array. Upon hearing a signal, we attempt to re-sight the bird to determine its survival status. Because of their ability to make large movements in a short time period, following birds via hand tracking proves difficult at times. However, our efforts are greatly improved by the tower array and the ability to fly in a small plane over the study site.



Since night-herons are nocturnal foragers, we use a combination of night and day tracking to differentiate between foraging and roosting locations. We can use this information to better understand habitat preferences of young night-herons. Night-herons were detected on all 12 of our local towers as well as 11 towers outside of the study site. The furthest detections of

tagged juveniles were at wildlife refuges in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Florida.

Fall migration and wintering locations

Capturing adult night-herons is much trickier than their newly hatched counterparts. We have tried a few different methods including mist nets, bungee nets, and a net launcher. In

the end, we found the

most success using a bungee net. This device, remote-controlled and powered by bungee cords, launches a net over the night-herons as they feed at a bait pile. Sites were baited with walleye and yellow perch skins left by fishermen at fish-cleaning stations.

Although night-herons would not be able to capture these species naturally, they readily use the fish at these stations to supplement their diet. After much trial and error, we captured a total of 10 adult night-herons. Each bird was measured, banded, and fitted with an ARGOS satellite transmitter.

Outside of a small number of recoveries of banded birds,



The night-heron colony
at West Sister Island



Attaching a satellite transmitter



we have little data on migration of *Black-crowned Night-Herons*. By tagging these birds with satellite transmitters, we can determine dates of arrival/ departure, identify migration routes, wintering locations, and landscape-scale habitat use of adult *Black-crowned Night-Herons*. We found that migration departure times of satellite tagged adults were spread out over a period of 3 months with three birds departing in September, four in October, and two in November. To our surprise, migration included a transnational movement for two of the birds! These two birds spent the winter in Cuba, while the remaining night-herons wintered in Florida (4), South Carolina (2), and North Carolina (1). Individuals migrated both short (<2,000 km) and long-distance (>2,000 km), therefore exhibiting differential migration. Interestingly, birds pursued different migratory strategies,

with some individuals migrating directly to wintering sites within a few days, while other individuals made short stopovers, and still others several week-long stopovers. Now that we have identified migration routes

and wintering locations of Ohio night-herons, we can work to establish partnerships with states and conservation organizations to ensure future success of this species.

Kristie A. Stein is graduate researcher in the Avian Ecology Lab of Christopher M. Tonra in the School of Environment and Natural Resources at The Ohio State University.

Night-herons were marked with an alphanumeric colorband (right leg) and a USGS aluminum band (left leg). If you come across a banded night-heron, please report the band number and color along with the location to 1-800-WILDLIFE or wildinfo@dnr.state.oh.us.



Night-heron nestlings

2016 Big Year Birding

Laura Keene is an avid birder and photographer from Southwest Ohio. Her photography has been published in *National Parks Magazine*, *National Geographic*, and multiple news outlets. She is a former photo editor for the *Ohio Cardinal*. In 2016 she followed her dream and pursued an ABA Big Year. This is the second part of Laura's reflections on her 2016 Big Year.



Short-tailed Albatross

By Laura Keene
Photos by Laura Keene

Confronting Challenges...

Attu is one of the most remote places on earth, located some 1200 miles from the Alaska mainland at the western end of the Aleutian island chain. It's the site of the Battle of Attu, the only World War II engagement to be fought on incorporated US soil. The Japanese considered it vital in terms of strategic location, and now Big Year birders consider it a strategic and vital spot. It has an almost mythical reputation for vagrants that normally dwell on the other side of the International Date Line. The chance of breaking an ABA Big Year record without visiting Attu is slim indeed.

The plan was to fly to Adak, which has the westernmost civilian airstrip in the Aleutians,

and there board the 72 foot M/V Puk-uk, along with eight other birders and two guides. This vessel would take over two days to steam to Attu, providing the opportunity for pelagic birding along the way, and then drop anchor in Attu's Casco Cove. We would then take a skiff to the island for each of twelve days, to hike and mountain bike over its terrain.

Even the best laid plans can go awry. A week before the trip, we heard that Attu was blanketed with 5-7 feet of snow. Then we were notified that the M/V Puk-uk was experiencing mechanical issues and had to wait in Sand Point for a part to arrive from Florida. We were stranded on Adak the 4 days it took for the part to arrive and be installed. The extra days on Adak presented logistical difficulties,

as lodging and rental vehicles are limited. However, this challenge turned into a gift; Adak added eighteen species to my year list, including a striking pair of *Smew*.

When the M/V Puk-uk was back in service, we proceeded to Attu without further incident, even photographing a rare *Short-tailed Albatross* along the way. We had five days of hiking and biking around the island, seeing multiple *Wood Sandpiper*, *Rustic Bunting*, and a few *Long-toed Stint*. Winds picked up one afternoon, and as I lagged behind getting my gear packed onto my bike, I spotted what might have been my best bird of the year, a gorgeous *Eurasian Hobby*. But sadly, when we arrived back on the ship, we were met with the news that a storm with gale force winds was headed our way, and that Casco Cove would experience



Scanning for waterfowl during lunch break at The Stacks on Attu Island

the brunt of it. The bicycles were stowed below deck, and with heavy hearts we were forced to leave Attu after only 5 days, not expecting to return.

We cruised southeast directly into the wind, seeking shelter in a protected cove of nearby Agattu Island. The following day, our luck changed for the better when an unexpected shift in the winds enabled a return to Attu for two final days of birding. This was too short of a time to re-land the bikes, so each day was 12 to 13 miles on foot. But the hardship was worth it; we were in place for our best days yet, adding *Eye-browed Thrush*, *Terek Sandpiper*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Wandering* and *Gray-tailed Tattler*, *White Wagtail*, and *Black-headed Gull*.

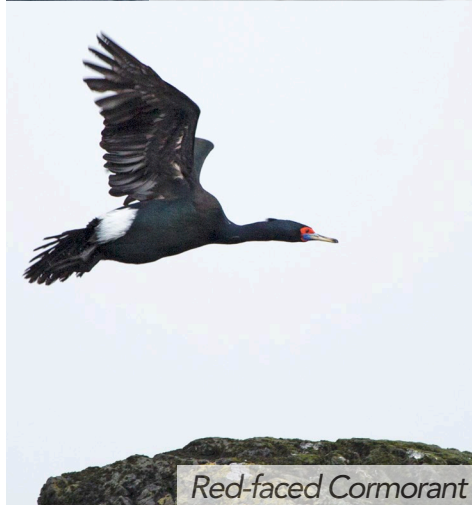
On the return voyage, we navigated Little Tanaga Strait, seeing thousands of *Whiskered Auklet*. Then we departed the ship in Adak, and raced to the beach to see a reported *Far Eastern Curlew*. In total, the journey added 48 species to my year list. Even with the obstacles, the trip was a resounding success. Captain Billy and his crew were remarkable; our leaders John Puschock and Neil Hayward were fearless. We intrepid birders had visited the legendary island of Attu, scored amazing birds, and forged a lifelong bond of friendship. *continued on page 8*



Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel



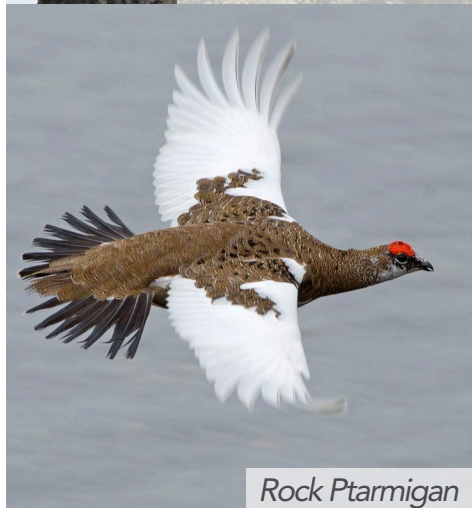
Bar-tailed Godwit



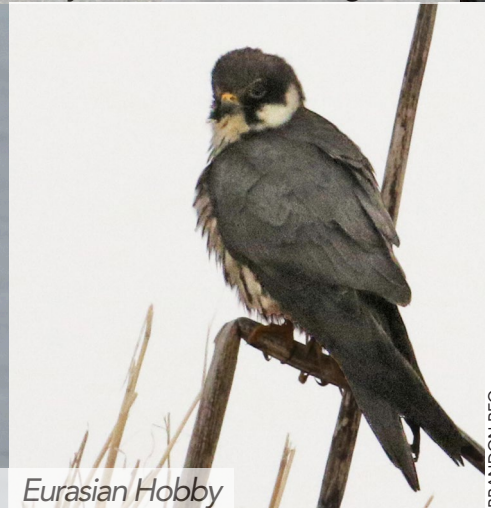
Red-faced Cormorant



Gray-tailed and Wandering Tattler



Rock Ptarmigan



Eurasian Hobby

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Anhinga
at Green Cay Wetlands, Palm
Beach County, Florida



Barred Owl

Pyrrhuloxia

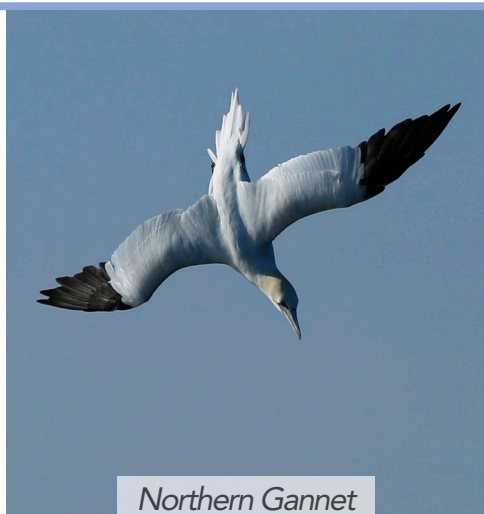
The Unexpected Rewards...

After giving a couple of presentations to birding groups, one question has repeatedly come up that I can't answer: What was the longest I waited for a bird? There's no easy answer. I know that on more than one occasion I spent a couple of days looking for rare hummingbirds in Arizona, and many days at seawatch in Gambell, Alaska searching for species to fill empty slots on my list. I spent more hours looking for *Golden-crowned Warbler* and *Flame-colored Tanager* in Lions/Shelly park in Refugio Texas than I spent sleeping in my own

bed at home the first few months of 2016. More importantly, though, this often-asked question leads to another question: what about the disappointment when the wait doesn't pay off?

It's easy to focus on the birds you don't see. The hours spent searching, the money expended for the travel, and even counting the number of mosquito bites can provide a quantitative measure of diligence and intent. Those sacrifices in themselves don't add a crucial tick to one's list, and missing a target species can be discouraging. But birding tends

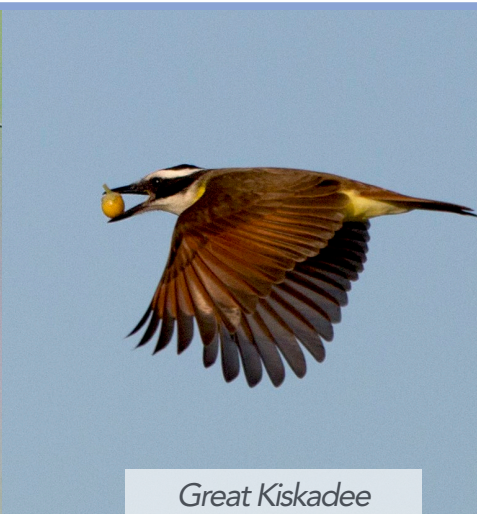
to happen in places where nature exhibits her innermost beauty and complexity. This may be why photography is so important to me, not only to document my species count, but to capture those unexpected moments. The experiences that may not boost my year list, yet preserve a glimpse of the random wonders that filled my soul with joy. These images inspire me not only to keep looking at birds, but at the wildlife surrounding them, and motivates me to learn more about their habits and their lives.



Northern Gannet



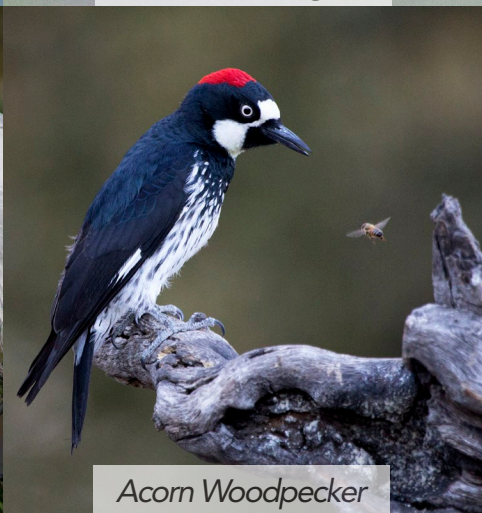
Lucifer Hummingbird



Great Kiskadee



Great Egret



Acorn Woodpecker



Pine Flycatcher -
1st ABA record gathering
nesting material on 6 June
in Pima County, Arizona

I often wonder how many birds I miss because my attention is drawn elsewhere. There were plenty of days that I fortuitously stumbled upon birds such as a rare *Northern Jacana* that had been playing hide-and-seek with birders the past few months. But perhaps I lost an opportunity to see the *Yellow-green Vireo* because I was trying to time a shot to the split-second when a bullfrog will snatch a bee. (I tried unsuccessfully for 45 minutes to perfectly capture the moment his tongue would snap and retrieve the bee he was

watching intently.) Did I miss the *Hook-billed Kite* because I was fascinated by a *White-tailed Hawk* repeatedly trying to untangle his legs from the snake he carried? Even when I knew it was futile to expect the rare *Flame-colored Tanager* to be present while a pair of *Barred Owls* sat nearby in a tree, I was riveted as I watched one owl periodically drop to the side of the stream bank to snatch a crayfish, remove the pinchers, and consume his shellfish delicacy. Did I miss rare pelagic species because I was on the wrong side of the

boat, captivated by squadrons of *Northern Gannets* suddenly dropping like ballistae into the seas in their coordinated hunt?

After one year of Big Year birding, I learned that it was not the rare bird I was searching to tick off my list that provided the most rewards. It was those moments of spontaneous magic that kept me fascinated. And it was those events that have and always will continue to ignite my passion and curiosity, and propel me outside, for more unexpected rewards.

Birding Calendar around Ohio

Please confirm event details and registration needs using the links provided.

30 September-1 October
BSBO's 25th Anniversary Celebration
Black Swamp Bird Observatory
bsbo.org

Sunday, 1 October
Fall Migration at Miami Whitewater Wetlands
Audubon Ohio, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnati.audubon.org

Tuesday, 3 October
'Birding Ohio's Lakeshore' with Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr.
Black River Audubon
blackriver.audubon.org

Tuesday, 3 October
'Who's spooky?' with Marquita Tillotson
Tri-Moraine Audubon
tri-moraine.audubon.org

Tuesday, 3 October
'Unveiling the Lives of Seabirds Using Stable Isotopes' with Anne Wiley
Western Cuyahoga Audubon
WCAudubon.org

Wednesday, 4 October
'Birding in Peru' with Gunnar Engblom
Kirtland Bird Club
kirtlandbirdclub.org

Saturday, 7 October
Migrants of the Olentangy Corridor
Columbus Audubon
columbus.audubon.org

Saturday, 7 October
Big Sit – Ohio River Islands
Brooks Bird Club
brooksbirdclub.org

Sunday, 8 October
GMA's Big Sit
Greater Mohican Audubon
gmasohio.org

Thursday, 12 October
Kroger Wetlands, Marietta
Brooks Bird Club
brooksbirdclub.org

Saturday, 14 October
5th Ohio Avian Research Conference
see page 11

Sunday, 15 October
Fall Color at Spring Grove Cemetery
Audubon Ohio, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnati.audubon.org

Monday, 16 October
'Being a Young Birder' with Ethan Rising
Audubon Ohio, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnati.audubon.org

Tuesday, 17 October
'Impact of Deer and Earthworms on Forests' with Ryan Trimbath
Blackbrook Audubon
blackbrook.audubon.org

Thursday, 19 October
'Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird' with Katie Fallon
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

Thursday, 19 October
'Birds of Ecuador' with Marlene Bolea
Canton Audubon
cantonaudubon.org

Monday, 23 October
'Bird Conservation in Ohio' with Matt Shumar
Delaware County Bird Club
columbus.audubon.org

Sunday, 29 October
Lake Erie Bluffs
Blackbrook Audubon
blackbrook.audubon.org

Saturday, 4 November
11th Annual Ohio Young Birders Conference
Ohio Young Birders Club
ohioyoungbirders.org

Tuesday, 7 November
'Chimney Swifts: Nature's Imperiled Avian Insectivores' with Judy Semroc
Black River Audubon
blackriver.audubon.org

Tuesday, 7 November
'Birds of Ecuador' with Janet Duerr
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

Wednesday, 8 November
Saw-whet Owl banding at Little Fish Brewery
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

Thursday, 16 November
'Turkeys in America' with Chuck Jakubchak
Canton Audubon
cantonaudubon.org

Saturday, 18 November
Lake Erie Pelagic
Black Swamp Bird Observatory
bsbo.org

Sunday, 19 November
Headwaters Park/La Due Reservoir
Blackbrook Audubon
blackbrook.audubon.org

Tuesday, 21 November
'Mentor Marsh Restoration' with David Kriska
Blackbrook Audubon
blackbrook.audubon.org

Tuesday, 5 December
'From Cloud Forest to Playa' with Rebecca Wood
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

Tuesday, 5 December
'Wildlife of Sandy Ridge' with Tim Fairweather



White-tailed Hawk with prey and Loggerhead Shrike watching in Hidalgo County, Texas

LAURA KEENE

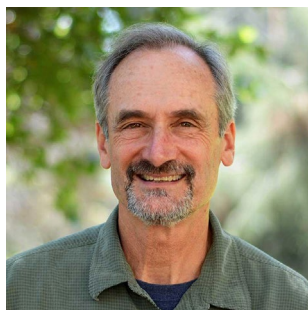
5th Ohio Avian Research Conference

October 14, 2017 at Denison University, Granville, Ohio

By Casey Tucker

For the past four years the Ohio Avian Research Conference has worked to help promote the science of ornithology to a broader audience in Ohio. This conference brings together professional academics, citizen scientists, museum workers, agency and non-profit biologists, students and birders from all over Ohio to share the latest information with one another about their research work both locally and globally.

The keynote speaker this year is Dr. Steven Beissinger, President of the American Ornithological Society (formerly AOU).



Dr. Beissinger is Professor of Conservation Biology and A. Starker Leopold Professor of Wildlife Ecology at the University of California at Berkeley. Read more about Dr. Beissinger at tinyurl.com/n3fhju4.

Conference sponsors include The Nature Conservancy of Ohio, Columbus Audubon's John Wilson Memorial Education Fund, The Ohio Biological Survey, and the Dept. of Ornithology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. The conference is also recognized by the American Ornithologist's Society (AOS). Student registration is \$15.00, non-student is \$35.00. Early registration ends Friday, October 6th, with prices increasing to \$25.00 for students and \$45.00 for non-students after. To register, visit tuckercasey.wixsite.com/aacri-birds/oarc2017.



Ohio Ornithological Society Membership Application

Join us online! ohiobirds.org

We provide a statewide birding network welcoming bird watchers of all interests and abilities to unite for the enjoyment, study and conservation of Ohio's birds.

\$15 Student/Limited income	\$100 Patron/Business
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*All members will receive the *Cerulean* and the *Ohio Cardinal* electronically. For Print Publications, please add \$20 to the membership fee. Membership is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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The *Cerulean* is our quarterly newsletter featuring articles and birding news around the state.

The *Ohio Cardinal* is our quarterly periodical that includes the current season's bird sightings and scientific articles.

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HELP US HELP THE BIRDS!

Conservation Fund	\$
Development Fund	\$

Total enclosed: \$

Name: _____

Organization: _____

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Please check your membership renewal date, **IN RED**, above your address!



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