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SNOwy OWl | MARLENe DE LA CRUZ-GuZmAN
continents and oceans, they have come to rely on humans to protect and safeguard their specific habitat needs, because human technological means now allow landscape level, even global changes to habitats that are still increasing in scale and impact: climate change and other pollution, development causing habitat disappearance, fragmentation, and degeneration, and non-sustainable harvesting. According to Franzen, asking for the value of birds (to humans) is not a sufficient motivator to protect them, even though some play arguably important roles as cultural icons and inspiration, or economically.

“One reason that wild birds matter—ought to matter—is that they are our last, best connection to a natural world that is otherwise receding” writes Franzen. Rather than consigning us to the prevalent utilitarian impulse of our current times and concede to the economic powers, another quite uniquely human trait, empathy, is needed to raise the conversation to an ethical level: that our privilege to rule the planet comes with an obligation to allow feathered fellow beings to continue to thrive, as they have millions of years before we have stepped onto the stage of the biosphere. As Franzen puts it: “[Birds] are the other world-dominating animals that evolution has produced, and their indifference to us ought to serve as a chastening reminder that we’re not the measure of all things”.

On February 15, a panel of eight international experts met at National Geographic’s headquarters in DC to discuss bird protection today and in the next 100 years. The discussion explored how technology is expanding our understanding of bird migration and highlighted current knowledge and efforts on the critical need to conserve birds. Panelists agreed that increasing public enthusiasm and support for birds and employing citizen science are important elements on the path forward to protect birds.
Jonathan Baillie, chief scientist and senior vice president of Science and Exploration at the National Geographic Society, said: “We’re not going to have very many birds unless we change things, are creative, and start making things happen. What’s important is getting back to nature and, culturally, that’s what we should do.”

Martin Wikelski, director of the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Radolfzell in Germany and National Geographic Explorer reinforced that notion: “We can get this going, but we need the public and citizen scientists to help us.”

Throughout the year, birders can visit nationalgeographic.org/projects/year-of-the-bird/ to learn about actions they can take to protect birds and check out monthly stories and articles about our feathered friends. A 2018 Year of the Bird is also motivated by the serious threats imposed on the MBTA by the current anti-environment forces in Washington. Since its inception, the law has prohibited the killing of America’s birds except under certain conditions, including managed hunting seasons for game species. According to an open letter signed by the American Bird Conservancy and hundreds of other organizations, the Trump administration proposed laws that attempt to permanently end the government’s ability to address major sources of migratory bird mortality from industrial activities such as power lines, communication towers, oil waste pits, wind energy, and gas flares. This roll back of the MBTA would dramatically reduce the incentive for industries to implement best practices that save birds, such as covering tar pits and marking transmission lines. The letter states that the proposed changes would limit the accountability and recovery from events and activities that kill millions of birds annually.

At a moment where we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the MBTA and the incredible gains made to protect our nation’s birdlife, efforts to gut the MBTA and turn back the clock decades on bird conservation would be truly regrettable.

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Stefan Gleissberg

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OOS Warblers and Wildflowers Weekend
April 27 - April 29, 2018

Join your fellow OOS members at Shawnee State Park for a celebration of Warblers and Wildflowers! This event is your chance to meet the first big wave of spring migration in Ohio, including birds like Cerulean Warbler and Chuck will’s-widow, that don’t typically make it to Lake Erie. Guided trips on Saturday and Sunday mornings, Friday and Saturday night Mothing at the cabins, and Chuck-will’s-widow trips to Adams county. Saturday box lunches available for purchase. To book a cabin, contact Shawnee Lodge at shawneeparklodge.com. To become an OOS member, visit ohiobirds.org.
Just last summer this owl had emerged from an egg in an Arctic landscape with next to no humans, trees, or streets, and finds itself along an interstate highway near Parkersburg, West Virginia. Used to flying low to the ground, it gets hit by a car, then takes refuge along an unloved creek bisecting a mall in nearby Vienna, not far from the Ohio border. There, between Panera and Ruby Tuesday, it becomes a local spectacle and the object of countless cell phone pictures and social media posts – all the while trying to rest during daytime and feed around the restaurant dumpsters at night. There I met Julie Zickefoose, who became part of an exemplary effort to turn the concern for the arctic owl’s well-being into a rescue action. This is a condensed and abridged digest of ten posts from Julie Zickefoose on Blogspot, totalling more than 15,000 words. For the whole story, and many more photos, see juliezickefoose.blogspot.com/2017/12/parkersburgs-snowy-owl.html

Edited by Stefan Gleissberg

This Arctic transient was reported sitting decoratively atop a highway sign at the I-77 and Emerson Avenue interchange near Parkersburg, West Virginia, and flirted with death by landing occasionally right in the middle of busy Emerson Avenue. Snowy owls come from a land Up Top, where there are no highways, no trees, no cars, no roads and no people. Every four years, Arctic lemming populations seem to surge. New radiotelemetry studies by Project SNOWstorm, spearheaded by Scott Weidensaul and David Brinker, are revealing that in years of high lemming abundance, snowy owls lay more eggs, and raise more young to fledging. A well-fed female snowy owl might lay up to fourteen eggs in a good lemming year. That’s a lot of baby owls. And when winter comes and food gets scarcer, the young owls are the ones that get chased out of adults’ territories. Some head even farther north and hunt sea ducks from ice floes. But most of them head south. They don’t fly south to stay warm; snowy owls are extremely well-insulated and built for unfathomable cold. They fly south because they have been asked to leave by the adult owls.
In Ohio, most winter visiting snowy owls gather near Lake Erie, resting at daytime, and probably flying out over the lake at night, surprising ducks, gulls and coots. This owl however, made an unusual choice that proved to be problematic. A man reported to two local birders that he had hit the owl with his vehicle near I-77, when it flew off a low wall into the right front bumper of his vehicle, leaving feathers in the crack. That was on December 6, 2017. The owl managed to move to Pond Run stream in Vienna’s Grand Central Mall, close to a busy four-lane highway, where it was first reported December 14.

Settling in the absolute center of human abundance, it seemed oddly content to be ringed by people all day long for a week running. The bird was constantly approached by people. Some kept a respectful distance, while others wanted to get close, closer, closest. At times, the owl would flee across the creek, surprising a photographer who’d been keeping a respectful distance from it.

Why would it sometimes fly away from one person and right up to another and sit on the ground at their feet, so tame, so otherworldly calm and seemingly trusting? Occasionally, the owl escaped to the top of a conifer, where it was easier to tolerate the ever-approaching humans. Being forced to move all day kept the owl from either sleeping or maintaining its body fat. And, thanks to its injury, this particular owl likely experienced pain flying.

However, if this owl was catching rats and mice behind the restaurants then that’s because the rodents are attracted to the dumpsters behind each building. And behind each restaurant, near their dumpsters, we found plastic bait boxes that dispense rat poison. Secondary kill from rat poison is one of the leading causes of mortality in snowy owls that venture into populated areas. The wonderful manager at Ruby Tuesday’s rushed to remove the rat bait station when we informed him of the problem. “I don’t know why I didn’t put that together!” he said, “But I’m so glad you told me!” He also told me he stopped two very large men who approached the owl with a blanket and a cardboard box, intending to capture it and...? They weren’t happy at his intervention, but he held fast, telling them to leave it alone.

I worried about that hurt wing. Bird Watcher’s Digest Editor Bill Thompson III contacted writer/naturalist Katie Fallon at the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, continued on page 6

Unlikely habitat for a young Snowy Owl: Grand Central Mall in Vienna, WV. It’s the white dot on top of a conifer behind the parked car.
conferring with his colleagues at WV Department of Natural Resources about what to do. Katie and Jesse enlisted Vince Slabe, raptor biologist and PhD candidate at WV University, to help capture the bird.

It was all moving at lightning speed. I felt like the church mouse who’d climbed up and managed to ring the bell, and it was clanging hard and fast. But really, the ringing was from all of us pulling together, galvanized into action by this wholly unacceptable fate for a threatened and beautiful bird.

On Dec. 21, the scheduled morning for the trapping, we all woke up early. Vince and Jesse would have a two hour drive from Morgantown; mine was only 45 minutes. Local birder Jon Benedetti hurried to the mall, only to find no owl! What?! The owl had been there without fail since Dec. 14, and now he’d quit the place? And then the bird was found on a telephone pole about 3/4 mile from the mall. In the bright morning sun it looked like a big light fixture. There was a pretty good group of local birders who’d been guarding the owl; USFWS employees from the Ohio River Islands NWR; and local law enforcement who’d thought they’d be doing crowd control at the mall.

Several hours went by. The owl sat on the telephone pole, its injured right wing hanging all the way down along the pole. I sat in my car, parked well back from the pole, and watched. I never took my eyes off that owl, all day long. I resisted the urge to chat with anyone; I wasn’t interested in chatting. I was interested in the owl.

Jesse Fallon captures the injured owl

Securing the talons

Eye exam

Injured wing hanging down, the owl oversees the scene

The owl pays no attention to a restaurant worker
Vince intended to use a cannon net to trap the owl. He tethered live bait in a little field, a surprising distance from the owl, and armed the cannon net. Ideally, the raptor, which has landed on live bait on the ground in front of the device, is covered in netting before it has a chance to fly up and away. He knew the owl could see the bait moving around, and it didn’t have to be right under the telephone pole for the owl to come after it.

The owl had perched, sunning and sleeping, for six hours while ignoring the bait, then decided to launch after it, at 2:07 pm. However, the cannon net failed to fire, so Jesse grabbed a pole net from his car and snuck up behind him and dropped it over the owl, just like Elmer Fudd used to do to Daffy Duck. Only a lot more smoothly and successfully.

It occurred to me, looking at it, that we might have been able to use that net on the owl over at the mall, when it was so debilitated that people were walking right up to it and trying to pet it. But that may be 20-20 hindsight. I’m glad Vince trapped the bird the old-fashioned way, asking it to come be trapped with food. The next thing I knew, at 2:10:28, Vince had that beautiful white owl in his arms, and Rich Bailey and Joey Herron were there smiling broadly. Jesse was back at his car, going through his medical supplies, getting ready to assess and rehydrate the bird.

With owls, if you keep control of the feet, you generally don’t have to worry about being bitten. Owls’ main weapons of resort are their feet. The owl appeared very calm, as if it knew it was being helped. But just in case the owl was not a cuddly grateful knowing wise “little baby,” as some had portrayed it in Facebook comments, but in fact a very pissed off Arctic apex predator with murderous intent, you absolutely do not want a snowy owl’s foot to close around your tender hand. Underneath that miraculous snow-shedding hairy floof (talk about specialized feathers!) are 1 1/4” long slender ebony scimitars that would very cleanly perforate your hand, meet on the other side, and not let go until it thunders or the sun goes down. Excruciating, and damaging. Remember, this bird can kill an Arctic fox, a snow goose...

So you may be sure that Vince kept a very good hold on the snowy owl’s legs while Jesse checked him out. Eyes were fine. You always want to check the eyes in a car-hit bird, because the huge eyes of an owl are very vulnerable to impact damage, as is the optic nerve. No problem with his eyes, hooray!

I’m sure that it’s the round heads, with large, forward facing eyes, that make humans connect with owls. Of all birds, owls have the most anthropomorphic appearance, and being humans, we connect best with beasts that remind us of ourselves.

When Jesse and Vince weighed the owl, it came in at 1100 gm—400 short of the 1500 gm minimum for a healthy male snowy owl. He’d lost 35% of his body weight. Did the emaciation occur over the two weeks since he was hit by the car, or was he already thin when he arrived in West Virginia? Maybe, but all that mattered now was saving his life.

Field intake exam finished, and before boxing the bird up for the ride to his clinic in Morgantown, WV, Jesse and Vince give the owl an injection of electrolytes and fluids. Rehydrating the bird is almost as important as feeding it. The fluids go in subcutaneously and are absorbed. It’s a challenge finding the owl’s skin, so thick is its downy insulation.

Fast forward to January 10, 2018: Katie Fallon writes that, after a month of expert care, feeding, medicating, monitoring, cleaning up after, and nursing the owl back to health at the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, the owl had fully recovered from the fractured coracoid bone in the shoulder and weighed a healthy 1800 grams.

The wild Arctic predator was ready to be released to the wild, at Presque Isle along Lake Erie where snowy owls are routinely seen in the winter. Author and owl caretaker Katie Fallon writes: “I hope he sees the Land of the Midnight Sun again, where the lemmings swarm and line owl nests with fur and food, swelling small fuzzy owlets’ crops with abundance.”
Join OOS birders...

The Best of Erie County
Spring Walk
Sunday, May 6, 2018

Join OOS members as we collaborate with Firelands Audubon Society to check out some great birding spots in Erie County. The 1,300-acre Edison Woods Preserve is one of the largest contiguous blocks of woodland in the region. It harbors a great diversity of forest-breeding birds such as Pileated Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Scarlet Tanager. We will begin at Edison Woods at the Smokey Road entrance (Berlin Heights) at 9:00 a.m. Later, you can choose to continue to Sheldon Marsh, Pipe Creek and possibly other areas. Spring migration will be in full force, so come join trip leaders Mary Warren (OOS Northwest Regional Director), Dan Gesualdo, Sheryl Young, Amy Didion, and Brad Phillips as we show you some of our favorite local hotspots. Pack a lunch and be prepared to have an awesome day. This event is free and open to all OOS members. For further information and to register for the walk please email Mary Warren by May 4 at windbird@bex.net.

May Bird Walk at Morgan Swamp, Ashtabula County
Sunday, May 20, 2018

At nearly 2,000 acres, Morgan Swamp is one of the largest protected wetland communities in Ohio. Join OOS leaders Tim Colborn (OOS Northeast Regional Director) and Craig Caldwell for a fun day of birding. We will meet at the parking lot at Long Pond at 7:00 a.m. The preserve harbors an array of rare species, many of which near the southern edge of their ranges. A faunal survey of the preserve has revealed 108 bird species. We will be exploring Long Pond Trail which includes a ¼ mile trail from the parking lot to an observation deck onto a 1-mile primitive trail extension to and from the observation deck. Walk is easy to moderate. In addition, we’re hoping to get a tour of the new Bissel Nature Center. This event is free and open to all OOS members and friends. For further information and to register please email gtcolborn@wowway.com by May 18. And, be sure to bring a sack lunch.
Join OOS birders...                 ... across Ohio!

Brukner Nature Center

Bird Walk

Tuesday, May 22, 2018

Brukner Nature Center is a privately funded organization promoting the appreciation and understanding of wildlife conservation through preservation, education and rehabilitation.

OOS Southwest Regional Director Steve Moeckel and BNC Director Deb Oexmann will lead a birdwalk in this diverse area beginning at 7:30 a.m. to end around 9.

We will meet at the Nature Center Building, 5995 Horseshoe Bend Road, Troy, Ohio. Pre-registration is not required but would be appreciated. Attendees can call 937-698-6493 or email info@bruknernaturecenter.org to register. BNC admission fee will be waived for this event.

Cedar Bog Nature Center

Bird Walk

Saturday, May 26, 2018

Join OOS Southwest Regional Director Steve Moeckel at 8 a.m. for a birdwalk at Cedar Bog Nature Preserve, 980 Woodburn Road, Urbana, Ohio. The group will meet at the Cedar Bog Education Center Building.

Cedar Bog is the largest and best calcareous fen in Ohio. One of the most characteristic plants of this preserve is white cedar or arbor-vitae. Significant boreal, as well as prairie and coastal plain species, occur here. Attendees should register by calling 937-484-3744, or email cedarbog@ctcn.net. Admission is required – $5 adult, $4 CBA, OHC, OOS members and children.
This is the sixth annual OOS CVNP day trip. We hope to pick up some late migrants and some early nesters, and as a bonus, butterflies, turtles, snakes, plants – this could be an ‘all-around’ trip.

We will visit Horseshoe Pond (Blue-winged Warblers), Deep Lock Quarry (Cerulean Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, various other warblers), Everett Road (swallows and possible Soft-shelled Turtles), Indigo Lake, Ira Trailhead, and other areas as time permits. Be sure to bring your camera! Limited to 20 people; email Sue Evanoff at sue.evanoff@ohiobirds.org to register. We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at the parking lot of Happy Days Lodge just off State Route 8 exit to Route 303 W. towards Peninsula. Please bring snacks and a lunch.

Lake Hope State Park
Bird Walk

Join trip leader and OOS Southeast Regional Director Alex Eberts as we explore the nearby trails and roads for southern Ohio specialties such as Cerulean, Kentucky, and Worm-eating Warblers. Meeting time is 7:00 a.m. at the Lake Hope State Park nature center off State Route 278 (note, this is not the dining lodge that many are familiar with; it is near the camping area, not the cabins).

We will end no later than 11:00 a.m. (depends on activity levels and weather), and there are some nearby fast food restaurants about 15 minutes away in McArthur for lunch.

Wayne County for Shorebirds!

Funk Bottoms Wildlife Area is popular for shorebirds in the Fall. OOS East Central Director Jon Cefus is leading a bird walk to this nearly 2,000 acres lowland area, starting in Wayne County and continuing west into Ashland County. This time of year, shorebirds, sometimes numbering in the thousands, stop when water levels are suitable.

We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Bellstores Gas Station at State Route 3 and State Route 95 near Wooster. This event is free and open to all OOS members. For further information and to register please email jcefus@gmail.com by September 11. Be sure to bring a sack lunch, snacks and plenty of water.
Birding Calendar around Ohio

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

Tuesday, 3 April
‘Theropods of a Feather Flock Together: The Evolution of Birds’ with Lee Hall
Rocky River Nature Center
Western Cuyahoga Audubon
wcaudubon.org

Tuesday, 3 April
‘Birding Israel’ with Jen Brumfield
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center
Blackriver Audubon
blackriveraudubon.org

Wednesday, 4 April
‘Carry-over effects in Prothonotary Warblers’ with Elizabeth Ames
Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Kirtland Bird Club
kirtlandbirdclub.org

Monday, 16 April
‘Birth of a New Earth’ with Adrian Parr
Winton Woods Visitor Center
Audubon Cincinnati
cincinnatiaudubon.org

Tuesday, 17 April
‘Rainbows, Bluebirds, and Buffleheads’ with Bill Beatty
360 E State Street, Athens, OH
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

20-22 April
Birds in the Hills Festival
Camp Ot'y/Okwa, Hocking County
Rural Action
ruralaction.org/birdsinthehills/

Saturday, 21 April
Spring Migration and Blooms
Shawnee Lookout Park
Audubon Cincinnati
cincinnatiaudubon.org

Monday, 23 April
Earth Day Walk with Alan Dolan
Jackson Bog SNP
Canton Audubon
cantonaudubon.org

Monday, 23 April
‘Decoding the Junco Vocal Repertoire’ with Dustin Reichard
Deer Haven Park
Delaware County Bird Club
columbusaudubon.org

Tuesday, 24 April
‘Climate Change and its Effects’ with Terry Root
Grange Insurance Audubon Center
columbusaudubon.org

27-29 April
Warblers and Wildflowers
Shawnee State Forest
Ohio Ornithological Society
ohiobirds.org

Saturday, 28 April
Conneaut Harbor Field Trip
Blackbrook Audubon
blackbrookaudubon.org

Tuesday, 1 May
‘Bluebirds and other Bug Busters’ with Teresa Caldwell
360 E State Street, Athens, OH
Athens Area Birders
groups.io/g/athensbirders

Tuesday, 1 May
‘How Birds Navigate the Americas’ with Andy Jones
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center
Blackriver Audubon
blackriveraudubon.org

Tuesday, 1 May
‘Lights Out! Bird and Building Collisions’ with Owen Lockhart
Rocky River Nature Center
Western Cuyahoga Audubon
wcaudubon.org

4-13 May
Biggest Week in North American Birding
Maumee Bay Lodge
Black Swamp Bird Observatory
bsbo.org

Sunday, 6 May
The Best of Erie County
Edison Woods
Firelands Audubon, OOS
firelandsaudubon.org

Thursday, 10 May
Ohio Birding Route Trail
Washington County, OH
Mountwood Bird Club
brooksbirdclub.org

Saturday, 12 May
Bird-a-thon
Greater Mohican Audubon
gmasohio.org

Saturday, 19 May
Glen Bernhardt Century Count
Sheldon Marsh SNP
Firelands Audubon
firelandsaudubon.com
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.

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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.

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

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