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# The Passenger Pigeon

## The Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

*March 2009 Vol 45 No. 3*

### **March Program: "An Evening in the Galapagos: Darwin's Finches and More" by Heather Farrington**

Many of you already know our March speaker, Heather Farrington, who studies evolutionary and population genetics in Darwin's finches of the Galapagos Islands. Heather will present a program on the Galapagos Islands with an emphasis on environmental problems and conservation of species on the islands. Heather will also talk about research work with many species of Darwin's Finches inhabiting the islands, their status, and other birds found on the Galapagos Islands. Heather said her talk will be fun and informative, and in her own words said, "I'll stay away from science-y titles".

Heather's work focuses on population genetics and the use of museum specimens to look at population changes over time. The main elements of her research on Darwin's finches are 1) evaluating changes in population sizes and connectivity (migration among populations) over time using genetic data from museum specimens, 2) examining the genetic structure of populations that are now extinct using museum specimens, and 3) contribution of genetic analyses to a mangrove finch conservation project currently underway in Galapagos. There are a few additional research projects she may include in the presentation if time allows.

Heather was born in Canton, Ohio and has always had a love for nature. She graduated from Mount Union College with a B.S. for a double major in business administration and biology. Heather started out as a fish person and wanted to be a marine and aquatic ecologist. She also has previous field experience in Michigan for wetland ecology (University of Michigan Biological Station) and Costa Rica for tropical ecology. After graduation Heather worked at WIL Research Laboratories in Ashland, Ohio as a scientific and technical writer for five years, then returned to school for an advanced degree.

Heather was accepted into the M.S. program in biological sciences at the University of Cincinnati in the fall of 2004. When she was nearly finished with her degree, she decided to advance into the PhD program. When she started the program at UC working on Darwin's finch evolution, she did exclusively lab-based work in genetics (no field work, just DNA in test tubes). Initially, her M.S. work focused on phylogenetics (studying the evolutionary relationships among Darwin's finches – very similar to the work Herman Mays presented a few months ago). She also teaches undergraduate labs in biology, genetics and ecology as part of her degree program at UC. Heather is the recipient of several university and

national grants, including a Sigma Xi grant-in-aid of research award in 2008 for her work on population extinction

In late 2005, Heathers' lab began planning a trip to the Galapagos. To prepare, her advisor got Heather and her lab mates in touch with the Gilmore Ponds banding group so they could get some exposure to avian field work. Heather says she was hooked from day one. She has been a regular volunteer at Gilmore ever since.

Heather would ultimately like to pursue a career in wildlife conservation and management – something that would potentially combine her background in business with her love for wildlife and biology.

Heather is also a member of Cincinnati Bird Club. Heather said, "I've learned so much in the past several years and the enthusiasm of the birding community in Cincinnati is amazing. A special thanks to all of you for the warm welcome I've received!"

This will be a great program and you won't want to miss it. Heather told me she came to learn that many people have misconceptions of the Galapagos Islands. Be sure to come to the March meeting to see and hear Heathers unique perspective on these biological gems.

*Contributed by Jay Stenger  
CBC Program Coordinator*

## **Honeysuckle Removal at Gilmore Ponds April 11th**

The Gilmore Ponds Banding Station needs help clearing honeysuckle from net-lanes on April 11<sup>th</sup> at 9am. Volunteers are asked to bring clippers, chain saws, or regular saws but extra tools may also be provided. Meet at the Symmes Road Entrance. Contact Eric Burgess at 513-505-7417. Email: [eric@lemicroscope.com](mailto:eric@lemicroscope.com)

## **Dayton, Ohio First in Bird Strikes**

On January 15, 2009 a US Airways Airbus A320 crossed paths with a flock of yet unidentified birds; the birds won. Both engines were struck and the aircraft made an emergency water landing on the Hudson River where all 155 passengers survived. Up until this point in modern aviation most people rarely think of birds and what happens when they strike aircraft. Interestingly enough for me, I recently completed my masters project on the subject of bird strikes with civil aircraft.

It seems it was inevitable that humans would collide (literally and figuratively) with birds. During my research I found that the history of bird strikes began with the same two brothers that fathered the first controlled, powered, and sustained human flight back on December 17, 1903 in North Carolina. On September 7, 1905 in Dayton, Ohio, the first reported bird strike was recorded by Orville Wright. Wright briefly described the event in his journal:

*"...flew 4,751 meters in 4 minutes and 45 seconds, four complete circles. Twice passed over fence into Beard's cornfield. Chased flock of birds for two rounds and killed one which fell on top of the upper surface and after a time fell off when swinging a sharp curve."*

As aviation developed, bird strikes would become deadly and on April 3, 1912 pilot Cal Rodgers' Wright Pusher aircraft struck a gull, resulting in a crash into the surf at Long Beach, California. Rodgers was pinned in the wreckage and drowned. Nearly 50 years passed before another [reported] bird strike would result in fatalities. Since these tragic bird strike accidents, aircraft design, propulsion, and performance have changed dramatically.

*Jeff Brown  
Mason*

## February 2009 Field Trips

### Westside Waterfowl Run

**Saturday, March 14, 8 AM**

**Leaders: Jay & Jack Stenger, (513) 522-8147, [javstenger@cinci.rr.com](mailto:javstenger@cinci.rr.com)**

**Meet: At the Park & Ride Lot, Rt. 128 located off I-275, Exit #7, Cleves-Miamitown.**

Waterfowl migration will be near peak on this date and that's the primary focus of this trip. But we expect to find many other species as well. Our plans are to caravan from the Park & Ride and make many spots along the way to Brookville Lake, including Fernald Preserve, a local gravel pit or two, a couple of Great Blue Heron colonies, and throughout the Brookville Lake region and Hueston Woods. We will return to the Park & Ride through rural farm country. The entire round trip will take us well into the afternoon. If you're strapped for time, feel free to call it a day at any point.

This should be an excellent trip. With a little luck we should be able to find 20 species of waterfowl and maybe a rare one or two. We also expect loons, grebes, cormorants, coots, gulls and many raptors, including Bald Eagles and Northern Harriers. Rough-legged Hawk and even Golden Eagle (recent sightings) is possible. Sandhill Cranes might be seen and Great Blue Heron colonies should be underway. Songbirds are not the focus this day, but many will be seen. Early spring migrants such as Tree Swallows, Eastern Phoebe, Rusty Blackbirds and even Pine Warbler are expected. The country roads may produce sparrows and Horned Larks and pipits, longspurs and Snow Buntings.

**Be sure you have plenty of gas before the trip.**

The round trip from the Park & Ride is probably around 100 miles, but we will likely add a few more miles to and from viewing sites. **We don't plan to stop for lunch, so be sure to bring a brown bag and drinks.** Don't worry; we will make plenty of rest stops. If you have a scope, bring it. This trip is mostly auto-touring, one viewing spot to another. March weather is unpredictable, but rain won't stop us. Severe weather would. If you are unsure if the trip is still on, or if you have any other questions, don't hesitate to call.

### Lloyd Library: Mark Catesby

**Saturday, March 21, 1 PM**

**Leader: Ann Oliver (513) 307-0929, [annieobirder@yahoo.com](mailto:annieobirder@yahoo.com)**

**Meet: 917 Plum Street, Downtown Cincinnati**

**Note: The Lloyd Library (513-712-3707) is adjacent to the Cincinnati Fire Museum.**

Join Anna Heran of the Lloyd Library for a look at the life and work of British naturalist Mark Catesby (1683- 1749). This is the final Saturday to view the special exhibit celebrating the work of this preeminent 18<sup>th</sup> century scientist, explorer and artist who dedicated his life to the first, fully illustrated study of North American flora and fauna. The Lloyd Library is fortunate to have one of the original folios of the 1731 work *Natural History of Carolina, Florida & The Bahama Islands*. Scanned illustrations of Catesby's original artworks are on display

including Little Blue Heron, Bobolink, Painted Bunting, Bald Eagle and more.

Who was Mark Catesby? He was the first to discover birds migrate, the first to recognize how destruction of habitat can lead to extinction, and the first artist to base his drawings and paintings on live observations made in the wild instead of dead, posed specimens. Catesby also depicted birds, butterflies, fish, and snakes in their natural habitats predating the work of artist John James Audubon by nearly a century.

Lloyd Library and Museum acquires, preserves, and provides access to both historic and current books and journals, as well as archival materials, on a wide variety of disciplines that fall under the subjects of natural history, botany, pharmacy, and medicine. The Cincinnati Bird Club is honored to have a special look inside their renowned facility!

## **Breeding Bald Eagles in the Greater Cincinnati Region**

No other bird seems to stir the emotions and generate so much excitement among birders and non-birders alike than the sighting of a Bald Eagle. They are an apt and fitting symbol of our nation's freedom and independence as well as the ethic of wilderness. Their sheer size, massive bill and talons and fierce expression all contribute to a formidable package that commands respect. There are many excellent local places to see these majestic birds, but that has not always been the case. During the second half of the twentieth century Bald Eagle populations seriously declined throughout North America and they were placed on the endangered species list in 1967.

Bald Eagles generally declined throughout the settlement period of North America and populations were already fairly low by the beginning of the twentieth century. Factors attributed to these early declines included a widespread loss of suitable habitat and shooting, which was described as "the leading cause of direct mortality in both adult and immature bald eagles," according to a 1978 report in the Endangered Species Technical Bulletin. The widespread use of DDT and related pesticides during the early 1950's and 1960's delivered the final knockout punch to these magnificent birds. Eagles became contaminated by these chemicals causing infertile eggs, or eggs with thin shells that broke under the weight of the incubating adults. The decline was not immediate, as eagles are long lived, but as adults died they were not replaced. In 1972 most uses of DDT were banned in the US. But it would take years for populations to recover. By 1979 there were only four nesting Bald Eagles pairs in Ohio.

But it was about this time that the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), aided by numerous state wildlife agencies, began making concentrated efforts to protect and manage remaining populations. Their efforts were successful and in 1995 the US Fish & Wildlife Service reclassified Bald Eagles from "endangered " to "threatened" and they were taken off of the list entirely in 2007. By 1999 there were 57 eagle nests in Ohio and that number has increased to last year's total of 184 nests.

Indiana's first modern eagle nest record was in 1991. In 1997 there were 15 nests, but by 2008 that number had increased to 90 nests. Kentucky's first nest was in 1986. By 1996 there were only 12 nests, but in 2008 the state number had grown to 51 nests.

In 2008 ODNR reported that there were 184 active Bald Eagle nests located in the following 48 Ohio counties: Ashland (1), Ashtabula (4.), Belmont (1), Columbiana (1), **Brown (1)**, Coshocton (3), Crawford (3), Cuyahoga (1), Defiance (2), Delaware (3), Erie (14), Geauga (5), Guernsey (1), Hancock (2), Hardin (1), Harrison (1), Henry (1), **Highland (1)**, Holmes (2), Huron (3), Knox (3), Lake (2), Licking (2), Lorain (2), Lucas (6), Mahoning (4), Marion (3), Mercer (2), Morgan (1), Morrow (1), Muskingum (2), Noble (1), Ottawa (25), Pickaway (2), Portage (4), Putnam (1), Richland (3), Ross (4), Sandusky (22), Seneca (6), Stark (1), Trumbull (11), Tuscarawas (3), Washington (1), Wayne (2), Wood (5) and Wyandot (10).

Our only modern local record of nesting eagles was 1952, when Worth Randle found a pair nesting for a year in Butler County along Indian Creek, a tributary of the Great Miami River. As recently as 2000, there were no nesting Bald Eagles in our region. But around 2003-04 Bald Eagles began nesting at a few suitable locations within an hour's drive of downtown Cincinnati. These nest sites included: Rocky Fork Lake SP, Highland Co. OH (1), near Higginsport, Brown County OH (1), Versailles SP, Ripley County IN (1) and Brookville Lake, IN (2 nests).

Due to the success of these nests, many local birders have expected and anticipated increased nesting attempts in the general region as well as at some "urban" sites. These hopes and expectations have been realized during this nesting season of 2009. Bald Eagles are now nesting in three urban/suburban areas of southwestern Ohio in Hamilton, Butler and Montgomery Counties. The Hamilton County nest is along the Whitewater River, just south of Harrison, Ohio and the Campbell Lakes Preserve. The Butler County nest is along the

Great Miami River just east of the US 27 Bridge at Ross, Ohio. The Montgomery County nest is just east of downtown Dayton, Ohio along the Mad River at Eastwood Metropark. Another new nest was recently discovered along the Whitewater River about five miles south of Brookville, IN.

That now brings us to a total of nine active area eagle nests that we know about, and I'm sure we can expect more. At this rate, I wouldn't be surprised if Bald Eagles may eventually become a fairly common nesting species at all of our local reservoirs, and along rivers and streams.

**Any birder who has been birding for even a short time knows that nesting birds should not be disturbed.** Many of these eagle nests are in remote areas or on private property. **But viewing an eagle nest from a safe and respectful distance of a few hundred yards or more at a public location is generally acceptable** and the ODNR has been pretty good with balancing the protection of these birds with the public's zeal to see them. Take the Brown County (Higginsport) or Rocky Fork State Park eagle nests for example. Those birds have successfully fledged young for a couple of years now with many birders watching them from a few hundred yards away. Actually, Bald Eagles have become common enough locally that they're now fairly easy to find during the winter and migration (away from nest sites) at several area locations.

*Contributed by Jay Stenger*

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**2008-2009 Dues:**

If you haven't sent in your dues yet for the September 2008 - May 2009 birding year, please fill out the form below and mail it in along with your membership fees.

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VISIT US ON THE WEB:  
[www.cincinnatibirds.com/birdclub/index.php](http://www.cincinnatibirds.com/birdclub/index.php)

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## Bird Club Membership

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\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$12.00    \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$15.00    \_\_\_\_\_ Student \$5.00

Make your check payable to **Cincinnati Bird Club**, and mail to our Treasurer:  
Lois Shadix, 2928 Saddleback Dr, Cincinnati, OH 45244

