



The Passenger Pigeon

Volume 49, Number 1

The Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

January 2013

Program: Member's Photo Night

Date:
Thursday, Jan 17
7 p.m.
Sharon Woods
Visitor Center

Our speaker for the January program will be ... you!. Or at least it could be you, if you have some photos of birds you would like to share with members and friends. The January program, as in past years, will again be the very popular members photo night.

At this program, we encourage all members to show some of their favorite photos and maybe tell us a little something about them. We also ask that each person limit the number of photographs to about 10 to 20 pictures to make sure that everyone gets a chance.

For those into digital photography, there is a digital projector available. Apparently slides are a thing of the past as no one has showed any at this program for several years. If you plan to show slides let us know in advance. If you have pictures on another type of drive, please contact me in advance of the meeting to discuss how to show your photos. There will be a laptop available, but if you have one, you might want to consider bringing it.

This is always a fun and interesting evening. I hope you can come out and share some of your photos with us. If you don't plan to present any of your own, you still won't want to miss this program, as I'm sure you will enjoy the diverse photos of our talented membership.

If you have any questions concerning this program feel free to contact me at steve.bobonick@gmail.com, (513) 829-2118

-Steve Bobonick



Snow Goose. Photo Courtesy
Lana Hays

Field Trips

(Contributed by Jay Stenger, Field Trip Coordinator)

Location: Camp Dennison to Armleder & Little Miami River Environs

Date: Saturday, Jan 26

Meet: 1 p.m. until dusk
(This is an afternoon trip)

AIM parking lot, Rte 126,
Camp Dennison
(see directions below)

Leader: Mark Gilsdorf
(513) 253-6062
markg74@gmail.com

This Little Miami River winter field trip has become an annual event due to its popularity and success. We originally planned the trip because January weather can be unpredictable and we thought it was a good idea to plan a trip closer to home during this month. That thinking still applies, but the field trip has also produced some very good birding over the years. As in the past this trip will begin at the Camp Dennison gravel pits (aka, Green Valley Preserve). Over the past 50 years these gravel pits have been one of the best winter waterfowl spots in our region and conveniently located right inside the I-275 beltway to boot. The Camp Dennison gravel pits almost always has open water, even during the coldest of winters, and has always attracted a great diversity of

waterfowl and waterbirds at this season, usually in significant numbers. While waterfowl numbers here may be down somewhat in recent years, a good variety of species can usually still be found there.

From Camp Dennison the trip will continue down the Little Miami River valley, making a few stops at various locations along the way, then end up at Armleder Park where we will bird until dusk. Armleder Park has become one of our most popular local hot spots and the varied habitat found there produces a great diversity of species. By ending the day here we also have a chance of seeing Short-eared Owls at dusk.

The stops along the way are at this time undetermined, the deciding factor being based on conditions closer to the date of the trip. But there is certainly no shortage of potential spots as there are a great number of “birdy” places along the lower Little Miami corridor. Valley View Preserve, the Newtown Gravel Pits, Bass Island, Kroger Hill Preserve, Mariemont Gardens and Lunken Airport are just a few of the spots we have to choose from.

Bob Foppe, our usual leader for this trip, is unavailable this year so Mark Gilsdorf is pinch-hitting for him. Mark knows the Little Miami Valley very well and has also been a regular on this trip so we can expect him to use his experience for a good afternoon of birding. This trip will combine some auto caravanning interspersed with some (level) walking. It is mid-winter and some trails may be damp and muddy (or snowy?) so it would be a good idea to dress accordingly. A scope will prove useful. Plenty of scopes should be on hand, so if you don't have one don't let that stop you from coming. Restroom stops will be made along the way. If you have any questions feel free to contact Mark.

Remember, the meeting time for this field trip is 1 PM. The trip will continue until dusk.

Meeting Place: We will meet in the parking lot of AIM, which is the name of a business which is located on the east side (same side as the pits) of Glendale-Milford Rd./Route 126. This is the business located at the extreme north end of the Camp Dennison gravel pits, just south of Fletcher Rd. and the bridge over the Little Miami.

Directions from the North: Take I-275 exit # 54/Wards Corner Rd. Go south about 1.5 miles into Miamiville. At the stop sign turn left on to Rt. 126 (called Center Rd.). Go east a short distance to a stop sign and turn right. You are still on Rt.126. Go across the bridge and past Fletcher Rd. and turn left into the AIM parking lot.

Directions from the South: Take US 50 towards Milford. Just before the bridge leading into Milford, turn left onto Glendale-Milford Rd./Route 126. Go north on Route 126 about 2.5 miles, through the village of Camp Dennison and continuing past the gravel pits on your right. Turn right into the AIM parking lot.

Local Calendar

Audubon Society of Ohio

Program: *Tanzania with Rick Lisi*

Date: Mon, Jan 21

See www.cincinnati.audubon.org for additional details.

Cincinnati Nature Center

Field Trips

January 12	Darlena Graham
January 26	Bill Stanley
February 9	Steve Bobonick
February 23	Lester Peyton (LBFT)

See www.cincynature.org for additional details.

Oxbow, Inc.

Program: *The American Bald Eagle*

Date: Tues, Feb 12

Field Trip: *Annual Moonlit Evening Winter Walk*

Date: Fri, Jan 25

See www.oxbowinc.org.

Raptor, Inc.

See www.raptorinc.org.

Conserving Total Bird Diversity in the United States

(From “Bird Conservation,” magazine of the American Bird Conservancy, Fall 2012. Reprinted with permission. www.abcbirds.org)

For bird conservationists, the coin of the realm has almost always been the species. Efforts to protect bird diversity are measured by species count, and efforts to prevent extinction—with some exceptions—focus at the species level. But natural diversity is almost infinitely complex, and so our species-based system of conservation priority-setting misses the vast array of differences that separate birds of the same species. This diversity cannot be protected until it has been recognized and ranked. ABC believes that bird conservation should address all diversity from the species to the population level.

At the next level beyond species are distinctive geographic forms, or “subspecies”. Well-known examples include Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted Northern Flickers, and Bronzed and Purple forms of the Common Grackle. But any good biologist will tell you that the differences between “birds of a feather” are more complex than meet the eye—and much more must be done to head off looming threats to birds beyond the species, and even subspecies, level.

For example, some bird species may not have recognized subspecies, but still have populations with separate ranges, such as eastern and western Barrow’s Goldeneyes, and eastern and western Golden Eagles. Other species have populations that occupy separate and distinct ecological niches, but are otherwise identical—for example, Swainson’s

Warblers that nest in Appalachian forests instead of bottomland swamps. Beyond this, there are species that have distinctive color morphs such as some owls, nightjars, jaegers, and raptors (some morphs are regionally concentrated, others are not); and even hybrid populations that occupy specific geographies. Myrtle and Audubon’s Warblers have such a zone in the Canadian Rockies. In fact, there are multiple, complex gradations of forms that in some birds are sharply defined, and in others blend from one to another across the landscape in “clines” from east to west or north to south.

While the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) includes subspecies as well as “Distinct Population Segments” the very word “subspecies” implies a level of inferiority that may affect the way these populations are viewed. Since so much conservation happens locally or regionally, most projects end up being directed at populations rather than at entire species. To maximize these efforts to conserve bird diversity, it would be better if actions were applied in a coordinated, strategic manner to protect all populations and ecological types.

How then can we unravel this vastly complex world of genetics and ecology to devise a national approach that truly addresses the conservation of all America’s bird diversity?

To draw conservation attention to the broader array of differences among birds, ABC has created a list for the 50 United States and U.S. territories that provides conservation rankings for both species and subspecies based on the standard bird conservation scoring system used by Partners in Flight. This list provides the critical first step in helping set priorities for those birds most in

need of help, regardless of their current status as a species or subspecies.

The list also identifies important geographic population segments, populations restricted to particular ecological niches, and some morphs and hybrids. The full list (along with its methodology and bibliography) is available on ABC's website (see www.abcbirds.org/checklist). A checklist version (including just forms that can be identified in the field) is included with this issue of *Bird Conservation* (see www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/birdconservation_pdf/MagFall12.pdf). This checklist includes color-coded conservation rankings from Secure (green) through Potential Concern (yellow), to Vulnerable (orange), and At-Risk (red). David Sibley's excellent online resource on identifiable subspecies helped us select which subspecies should be included. We would also like to thank David for the use of his superb illustrations for this issue of *Bird Conservation*—look out for the new edition of David's field guide coming soon.

This ABC list puts all birds on the radar screen for conservation regardless of taxonomic decisions so that we can better avoid birds “falling through the cracks” of conservation action. We are also pleased to include the birds of Hawai'i in the list, since our 50th state is home to many of America's most threatened birds.

The new ABC list also provides the scientific and conceptual basis for the articles and approaches detailed in this issue of *Bird Conservation* magazine (see www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/birdconservation_pdf/MagFall12.pdf). We look forward to much spirited and constructive debate on how we can work together to conserve the full diversity of America's birds.

We anticipate that some of the birds to which we have assigned full species status (as opposed to subspecies) in the ABC list may spark debate. However, it appears likely that as taxonomy advances, far more bird species will ultimately be recognized than is the case today. We welcome discussion on these issues, and we are particularly interested in how quantitative thresholds can be set that enable taxonomists, conservationists, and birders to agree on and operate off of a single global species and subspecies list. More details on our basis for making these decisions appear on the ABC website.

Species to Populations

While the primary focus of ABC's new list is on providing conservation ranks for species and subspecies, we also note those species within which variation is more gradual and those with disjunct regional “population segments” that may warrant conservation attention.

Subspecies can also frequently be aggregated into regional groups that show similar characteristics. While these groups may appear quite distinct from each other, the subspecies within them may be separable only by subtle characters such as bill measurements and plumage tones. These groups can be defined in various ways, and ABC identifies several in the enclosed checklist based on forms that show common field identification characters. A more detailed taxonomy of these groups is provided in the online version of the checklist.

The concept of population segments is currently known primarily in relation to the U.S. Endangered Species Act. In this context, a “Distinct Population Segment (DPS)” is a

population that is both discrete within, and significant to, a species, although its application is frequently determined by legal interpretation. While this is similar to ABC's definition of a population segment, a DPS cannot be designated without meeting the Act's standards for listing, and its designation may be subject to both biological and legal interpretation. In contrast, ABC's goal is to list all population segments so their conservation status can be monitored and addressed prior to the need for listing.

The concepts of morphs and hybrids, though well understood and accepted, are infrequently considered in conservation circles, and ABC's "habitype" division is new.

Morphs

Around fifty American bird species have some color variants that can be regarded as morphs, and these species come from a surprisingly wide range of families. Some of these morphs occur within species that are already known to be of conservation concern, such as the Pink-footed Shearwater and Reddish Egret.

While it is unnecessary to direct conservation to specific color variants that occur randomly across populations, some morphs are geographically concentrated – such as the range-restricted dark morph of the Broad-winged Hawk that nests in Alberta, Canada – and some of these may be worthy of conservation attention.

The dark morph of the Least Bittern, also known as Cory's Least Bittern, was largely restricted to areas around Toronto, Canada, although records came from as far afield as Florida and Michigan. Sadly, there have been

no confirmed North American reports of this rather spectacular form of the species for several decades. As long as morphs that are geographically concentrated and potentially of conservation concern remain off the conservation radar screen, there is less chance that the bird community will be aware of or able to respond to changes in their populations or threat levels. While we recognize that both conservation need and opportunity will be rare, we hope the new ABC list will be a first step towards assembling better data on the status and distributions of these intriguing birds.

Hybrids

Hybrids – the offspring of pairings between different species – are often overlooked by the bird conservation community. When conservationists think about hybrids it is most often in the context of preventing them – especially those that benefit from human activities at the expense of rarer species whose populations could be genetically "swamped". Well-known examples include Barred Owls (that are spreading northwest due to human-caused habitat fragmentation) interbreeding with Spotted Owls, and Mallards interbreeding with Hawaiian or Black Ducks.

Many birds occasionally naturally hybridize in the wild, but we generally have little information on what happens to the offspring of these pairings. There are a few species, though, such as Myrtle and Audubon's Warblers, that hybridize successfully on a regular basis, and several that have stable "hybrid zones" where intermediate populations can reliably be found. Another regularly occurring, though less geographically concentrated, set of hybrids are the various combinations between Blue-

winged and Golden-winged Warblers (and between them and their hybrid offspring) that give rise to the stunning “Lawrence’s Warbler” and to the subtly beautiful “Brewster’s Warbler”.

Many of us consider hybrids to be unwelcome and a potential threat to genetically “pure” bird species. Hybrid gulls along the Pacific Coast in particular frequently draw the wrath of birders, because they are increasingly abundant (thanks to human-created landfills and offal discarded from fishing boats), cannot clearly be identified to species, and perhaps at a more fundamental level, seem to represent a form of genetic pollution that decades of popular science and science fiction have taught us to shun. Why should we view natural hybridization negatively though? Some of these hybrid populations may be worthy of conservation attention, particularly those that are geographically concentrated.

If birds in one of these hybrid zones came under threat, what should our reaction be? Should we be pleased that hybridization was going to be reduced, or should we act to protect the population as a valid component of our overall avian diversity? Birders may well be enticed by the idea of seeing a stunning Lawrence’s Warbler, but bird conservationists have yet to determine if and how we value hybrids from a conservation standpoint.

Habitypes

ABC coined the term “habitypes” to refer to birds that have unique ecologies, but that are not otherwise distinctive from related populations. Two classic examples that we often refer to are Swainson’s Warblers that nest in Appalachian rhododendron thickets

instead of bottomland hardwood swamps, and Marbled Murrelets that nest high in trees in coastal forests of the Pacific Northwest rather than among Alaskan scree slopes.

Other examples include Common Terns that nest in freshwater rather than marine areas; and oak and cottonwood, rather than conifer-nesting, Lewis’s Woodpeckers. Each of these habitypes is ecologically unique and represents an irreplaceable and fascinating element of avian diversity, yet was not previously distinguished for conservation purposes from other populations of its species in any formal way.

ABC believes that these, and other such habitypes, have conservation value, and we identify some of them in the notes section of our list on the website. Beyond habitypes, other measures of bird diversity include regional variations in song type and molt timing. Further study may reveal even more cryptic patterns that have conservation significance. We look forward to hearing of additional examples that can be added to the list.

Fastest declining migrants

American Wigeon	Golden-winged Warbler
Northern Pintail	Cape May Warbler
Horned Grebe	Cerulean Warbler
King Rail	Palm Warbler
Lesser Yellowlegs	Wilson’s Warbler
Franklin’s Gull	Lark Bunting
Black-billed Cuckoo	Grasshopper Sparrow
Black Swift	Baird’s Sparrow
Rufous Hummingbird	Rusty Blackbird
Allen’s Hummingbird	Horned Lark
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Bank Swallow
Varied Thrush	McCown’s Longspur
Chestnut-collared Longspur	



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Cincinnati Bird Club
c/o Newsletter Editor
15 Sherry Rd
Cincinnati, OH 45215

President: Mark Gilsdorf

email: markg74@gmail.com

Program Chair: Steve Bobonick

email: bobonick@msn.com

Field Trips: Jay Stenger

email: jaystenger@cinci.rr.com

Newsletter Editor: Harris Abramson

email: harrisabramson@hotmail.com

Treasurer: Lois Shadix

email: lcshadix@fuse.net

Park VIP: Jay Lehman

2012-2013 Dues:

If you haven't sent in your dues yet for the September
2012 - May 2013 birding season, please fill out the form
below and mail it in along with your membership fees.

Visit us on the Web at:

www.cincinnatibirds.com/birdclub/index.php

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Lois Shadix (lcshadix@fuse.net), 2928 Saddleback Dr, Cincinnati, OH 45244