



# The Passenger Pigeon

Volume 49, Number 6

The Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

September 2013

## **Program:**

**Nesting Wood Warblers  
East of the Mississippi  
River**

## **Speaker:**

**Karl Gross**

## **Date:**

**Friday, Sept 20  
7 p.m.**

**Sharon Woods  
Visitor Center**

Our guest speaker for our September meeting will be Karl Gross, who will present his program entitled "Nesting Wood Warblers East of the Mississippi". Karl is a native Cincinnati and is actually a career electrical engineer designer who has contracted with some of the largest corporations in the United States including P & G, IBM, Fluor Daniel and the US Government. But Karl's greatest interests have always been nature and photography. He has a strong conservation ethic and is a long time member of the Cincinnati Wildflower Preservation Society, The Cincinnati Bird Club and the National Audubon Society. You may remember Karl having presented a couple of past CBC programs which were well received.

Karl is a bit of a throw-back in that he is a naturalist photographer, meaning that at first, his interest in photography was secondary to his interest in nature. Since Karl was a teenager, about 40 years ago, his first love was always nature and particularly birds and wildflowers. Karl studied plants and animals and before long was photographing them. While Karl never took the step to join the professional ranks, he nonetheless became an expert and skilled photographer. His photography has always been top notch and he has taken uncountable pictures over the years here at home and during his considerable travels throughout North America, the Caribbean and Central America in pursuit of wild fauna and flora. He has even filmed extensively underwater, which led to his considerable undertaking of growing his own coral in tanks amassing 50,000 gallons of saltwater

Karl has spent a lot of time studying and photographing warblers and the habitats and plants they use. Over the years Karl has taken an exceptional number of nesting warbler photos. He has a goal to eventually photograph the nest of every species of North American warbler. Karl's September program will focus on the ecology, life histories and conservation of about 20 species of eastern US warblers. We hope you can make it for what should prove to be a very interesting and informative program.

*-Jay Stenger, Program Coordinator*

## Field Trips

*(Contributed by Jack Stenger, Field Trip Coordinator)*

### **Location:**

Brookville Lake Area, IN

**Date:** Saturday, Sept 14

**Meet:** 7:30 a.m.

Miamitown Park and Ride  
(see directions below)

**Leader:** Paul Wharton

(513) 353-3403

pwharton@fuse.net

Mid-September is the peak of fall migration for songbirds, raptors, and shorebirds - the focus of this trip. We will spend the morning looking for migrant songbirds in the diverse woodlands surrounding Brookville Lake. As the air heats up we will keep an eye out for migrating raptors, which are often concentrated above the ridges along the Whitewater River valley. Paul has an unbelievable eye for spotting soaring raptors, so providing proper conditions there is a great chance to see several species of hawks, eagles, vultures and predatory parrots (falcons). After morning songbird activity dies down, our focus will shift to waterbirds. When water levels are right, the north end of Brookville Lake is a magnet for shorebirds, waders, and terns.

This trip will run well into mid-afternoon. We will caravan to Brookville Lake and do some driving from spot to spot interspersed with lots of stops and some easy walking. Bring your lunch and drinks. Restrooms are

available. One important note; Indiana State Parks charge a daily per car entrance fee (\$5 resident, \$7 non-resident). At this time of year there is about a 50/50 chance that there will not be a fee charged. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the park & ride lot, located at the I-74/I-275 Miamitown exit # 7 at SR 128. We will caravan from here to the Brookville area, about a 25- minute drive. Call or email Paul if you have any questions.

### **Location:**

Indian Creek Wildlife Area

**Date:** Sunday, Sept 22

**Meet:** 8 a.m.

Indian Creek WA  
(see directions below)

### **Leader:**

Bill Stanley

(513) 724-2663

tyrannus@fuse.net

Few locations in our area offer the habitat diversity of Indian Creek Wildlife Area. Its 1,799 acres provide a mixture of woodland, grassland, and successional areas that provide habitat for nearly all of our migrant songbirds. Also, a 56 acre wetland attracts shorebirds and waders when water levels are low. With Bill's birding acumen and knowledge of the area, participants can expect to have a morning of fantastic birding. For more information birds of the area, see Jay Stenger's description of Indian Creek: [www.cincinnatibirds.com/where/IndianCreek.php](http://www.cincinnatibirds.com/where/IndianCreek.php)

This trip is a morning walk that will wrap up by noon. Most of the morning will be spent on foot walking the seldom-traveled gravel roads. There are no restrooms at Indian Creek. The nearest restroom is in the Marathon gas station in Fayetteville, on the corner of Route 50 and Route 68. Meet at the parking lot on Snowhill Rd. just east of the Wildlife Area headquarters. This parking lot is labeled on this map of the Indian Creek Wildlife Area: [www.ohiodnr.com/Portals/9/Images/hunting/Wildlife%20Area%20Maps/pub022.gif](http://www.ohiodnr.com/Portals/9/Images/hunting/Wildlife%20Area%20Maps/pub022.gif)

## Local Calendar

### Audubon Society of Ohio

**Program:** *Boreal Owl Research in Alaska*

**Date:** Mon, Sept 16

See [www.cincinnati.audubon.org](http://www.cincinnati.audubon.org) for additional details.

### Cincinnati Nature Center

#### Field Trips

Sept 14 Bill Stanley  
Sept 28 Mike Kravitz  
Also on the 28<sup>th</sup>, bird banding and Raptor, Inc, as part of Great Outdoor Weekend

See [www.cincynature.org](http://www.cincynature.org) for additional details.

## Oxbow, Inc.

### Field Trips

Sept 21 Jack Stenger  
Oct 06 Ann Oliver

See [www.oxbowinc.org](http://www.oxbowinc.org) for additional details.

### Fernald Preserve

**Field Trip:** *Bird Banding with Dave Russell*

**Date:** Sat, Sept 14

See [www.lm.doe.gov/ferald](http://www.lm.doe.gov/ferald) for additional details.

## Important Bird Club News

Welcome to the 2013-2014 Cincinnati Bird Club season! I hope you have had a wonderful summer and are ready for another great line-up of programs and field trips. To begin, let me acquaint you with this year's Board members. After covering programs for the past two seasons, I have rotated into the role of President. I replace Mark Gilsdorf, who has rotated off the Board. We thank Mark for his dedicated service over the past four years. Jay Stenger will be taking over the Program Coordinator role. Harris Abramson will continue as our Newsletter Editor, and Lois Shadix will continue as Treasurer (for as long as she wants the job!). New to the Board this year is Jack Stenger, who will begin his four years of Bird Club leadership by handling field trip coordination. Welcome Jack, and thanks!

We have two important changes this season. First, we are returning to the historical meeting day of the third Friday of each month. One exception to this will be the November meeting which will occur on Friday, November 22 (this is actually the fourth Friday of November). We are hoping that this move will permit more people who are still working full time or are students to be able to attend our programs. The meeting night was reluctantly moved to Thursday nights many years ago when we were forced to vacate the old Natural History Museum in Eden Park due to their move to Union Terminal. At that time, Friday nights were unavailable at Sharon Woods. Sharon Woods will continue to be our meeting venue this year.

Second, we will no longer mail the newsletter to your home, unless you specifically request it and pay a surcharge of \$25.00. The majority of our members receive the newsletter on-line, and the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter to a small group of individuals has become cost prohibitive. Even the National Audubon Society is no longer mailing the Christmas Bird Count results...email only! If you are switching from mail to email, please be sure to inform Lois Shadix of your email address (lcshadix@fuse.net). Note that we are holding the membership dues at the current level of \$12.00 for individuals and \$15.00 for families. Students under 18 continue to be free. The dues cover the costs of facility rental, speaker honorariums and refreshments for the November meeting. Please take care of this year's dues as soon as possible...we operate on a very tight budget!

I encourage you to take full advantage of the learning opportunities and camaraderie offered by active participation in YOUR Bird Club. I'm looking forward to seeing all of you at the meetings and in the field.

Good Birding!

Steve Bobonick  
CBC President. '13-'14

## **Reporting Rarities-- Elements of a Bird Description**

*(From eBird.org, Sept 2013, contributed by  
Lauren Harter. Reprinted with permission.)*

Documenting a notable bird sighting is a part of everyday life for most birders, especially with the growing popularity of eBird. With the increase in documentation out there, though, in many ways there has been a decline in the quality of documentation. Sometimes it is difficult to know exactly what to write in the comments box, or what to give when you're asked about a bird sighting. Here we discuss some of the elements commonly seen in bird descriptions in eBird, and which of these are more or less valuable as documentation. The focus here is eBird documentation, but much of this also applies to writing bird descriptions for other purposes, such as North American Birds or submitting a report to a bird records committee.

If you feel that writing a bird description is more trouble than it's worth, we recommend [www.birdfellow.com/journal/2011/02/14/lost\\_art\\_revisited\\_alternatives\\_to\\_taking\\_notes](http://www.birdfellow.com/journal/2011/02/14/lost_art_revisited_alternatives_to_taking_notes) by Dave Irons. Another great article on the why, how, and what of bird documentation is [www.greglasley.net/document.html](http://www.greglasley.net/document.html). Finally, we urge all eBird users to get to know the

review process by reading <http://help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/1055676-understanding-the-ebird-review-and-data-quality-process> regularly!

The list below is structured *from least helpful to most helpful* in bird documentation. We want to stress that any information you provide is useful, and that more information is always better! The point here is to encourage eBird users (and others) to include more of the really helpful information.

### **Incidental Narrative**

Example: “I was just taking a break from setting up my cousin Bob’s wedding and decided to go for a walk. I was walking down by the creek, going really slowly because it was muddy, and contemplating life, etc. etc. when I spotted this bird!”

Incidental narratives are great. They help put the sighting in context and will help you remember it years down the road. Sometimes they can contain valuable information, like time of day, precise location, weather, or other observers. Often, though, they aren’t much help to the reviewer because they don’t actually provide any documentation of the field marks seen on the bird.

### **Where the bird was perched, When it flew**

Example: “The bird was perched on a dead oak stick 30 feet from the second waterfall about two feet above the ground. After it saw me come around the corner, it stayed for about 10 seconds before flying off.”

These are the most common elements of bird descriptions in eBird, and users often end here. It’s helpful to know exactly where the bird was in case people want to chase it, and behavior can be useful in evaluating a record. But for a record that is flagged, this is not enough.

### **Habitat**

Some birds are very particular about their habitat, and it may be difficult to infer from the sighting location what the exact habitat was like. Noting elevation, habitat type, dominant species, nearby water bodies, etc. can be very helpful.

### **Distance to the bird, lighting, optics, length of observation**

These and similar details can be important, especially for very notable sightings, and are often requested by bird records committees.

### **Continuing?**

If you know you are seeing a continuing bird, it is important to note it as such. Even if you aren’t sure, take note of your suspicions. “Possibly the bird that was seen here a month ago.” On the flip side, if it was not a continuing bird but could be confused with one, note that too. “Not the one that was seen here a month ago. That one was an adult and this is a juvenile.” Sometimes, all that is needed for a continuing bird is that one word: “Continuing.” One practice reviewers really appreciate is to say “Continuing. Photos available if requested.” Of course, it never hurts to document even a known rarity with more information. This information becomes especially valuable if your sighting ends up being the last one of a given individual’s occurrence.

### **Familiarity with this species and confusion species**

Whether it is a species you know well or one you had never heard of before, it is good to make note of it. Remember, though, that “Have seen this species many times in my backyard on Nantucket Island” is probably not enough to have the record validated on its own. In fact, this can be a warning sign, as it implies the bird wasn’t looked at

carefully under the assumption that it was common. In reality, traveling birders frequently make misidentifications because they assume a species to be common when it is in fact rare where they are birding.

### **Recognition of the rarity of the sighting**

If you browse sightings in eBird, you may have noticed notations like “\*Early,” “\*\*Very rare,” “\*\*\*First county record!” or “\*\*\*\*MEGA!!!”. eBird encourages these notations as an indication that the observer knew why the sighting was being flagged. It’s good to note whether you knew it was rare, or not! Here are just a few examples of things you could say to let the reviewer know that you have given the sighting some thought:

“My first of the spring.”

“Very unexpected in this habitat!”

“I see this regularly back home on Nantucket Island, but now I’m looking in the guides and see that this species is rare in this area. Still, I’m confident of what I saw.”

“I just snapped the photo, not thinking much about it at the time, so I did not take any further notes.”

“I was scanning a flock of Long-billed Dowitchers hoping for a Short-billed, which would be a state bird, and when I spotted this bird I suspected I had one.”

Also completely valid to say: “Species is not unexpected in this area at this time of year” *If you know for certain that is true.*

### **Age and Sex**

When it can be determined, noting the age and sex of the bird(s) is essential and should be the first part of your bird description.

At this point, if you have included all the above information, you may be on your way to a great bird description. **However, if you stop here, you are stopping short of documenting the bird!** Take this hypothetical example: “I came upon the

Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet in the Bill Williams River NWR around 11 a.m. Sunday morning. It foraged low in a cottonwood 3 feet from my face for 30 minutes! I was shocked to see one this far north, but I am very familiar with the species from my travels in Mexico and am certain of the sighting.” If a reviewer were to see this in eBird, they would certainly be intrigued, but such a rarity would require some sort of documentation to back up the sighting in order to be considered “confirmed”.

The three items below may not be required for a really low-end or continuing rarity, but without them, you have not documented your sighting and you may receive an email asking for more details.

### **A description of the bird**

This is the heart of bird documentation: a description of what you saw. For a high count in eBird, it may not be necessary to describe your identification of the species involved (but it can’t hurt). In those cases, a description of how you arrived at your count or estimate is more helpful. Otherwise, a bird description means just that: a description of the bird. What did it look like? If you realize it is a rarity at the time of the sighting, take some time to make mental, if not physical, notes. Even if you get a photo, video, or sound recording, descriptions are still immensely helpful, and learning to write a bird description goes hand-in-hand with becoming a keen observer. Say you got great photos from all angles. Now, stop and watch the bird for a while. What is its behavior? Does it vocalize? Try to describe the vocalizations, as they are sometimes extremely important in identification. For much more on what makes a good bird description, we highly recommend this very helpful [www.birdfellow.com/journal/2011/01/23/a\\_10st\\_art\\_writing\\_descriptions\\_of\\_rare\\_birds\\_by Dave Irons](http://www.birdfellow.com/journal/2011/01/23/a_10st_art_writing_descriptions_of_rare_birds_by_Dave_Irons).

## **How similar species were eliminated**

Yes, we're counting this category as more valuable than the description of the bird. In some cases, it may not be needed. What could you confuse with an adult male Painted Bunting? But, if you are claiming a Glossy Ibis, it isn't enough to note "Tall dark bird, glossy reddish and brown, long legs and long downcurved bill, pale lines on the face." That could describe White-faced Ibis just as well, and some folks with an older field guide may not know that White-faced Ibis exists! For most rare birds, some analysis of how similar species were eliminated will go a long way.

## **Physical documentation: Photo, audio, video**

It is now possible to embed photos, audio, and video directly into an eBird checklist. This is the best way to share your documentation, since it will be easily visible to all users. See eBird's <http://help.ebird.org/customer/portal/articles/973966> for details. A simple link will also work, or, if you choose not to share your documentation online, leave a note for the reviewer: "Photo/audio/video available upon request" and wait for them to contact you. These are the most common forms of what is called physical documentation and are the only way to prove what you saw without a specimen. Still, sometimes the bird may not be identifiable from the material, so remember to take notes and include a written description of the bird, as well.

Keep in mind also that reviewers see records from all kinds of observers, from records committee members and other eBird reviewers, to brand-new birders using Google to identify birds. The skill of the birder may be taken into consideration if it is known, but it is always best to assume that the reviewer has no idea who you are or

what your experience is, especially if you are traveling to a new area. Take the time to describe even an easy ID (American White Pelican: Counted a flock of gigantic white birds swimming and sitting on a sand bar. Short yellow legs, very long yellow bill.) to make it clear that the ID is correct, for the reviewer and for anyone revisiting the record down the road.

In summary, when documenting a notable bird sighting for eBird or any other purpose, all information is useful information. Before you hit "submit", stop and ask yourself, did I describe the bird? If someone is looking at this record 50 years from now, will they be satisfied with this documentation? Bird documentation is essential to citizen science and the ornithological record. When you take the time to practice it, you will not only make your sightings more useful, you will make yourself a more keen observer. We hope this information will be helpful for eBird users and others.



## The Passenger Pigeon

### Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

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2013-2014 Dues:

If you haven't sent in your dues yet for the September  
2013 - May 2014 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](http://www.cincinnatibirds.com/birdclub/index.php)

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## Bird Club Membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Yes I would like to receive my newsletter via e-mail. E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$12.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Student (under 18) FREE

Make your check payable to Cincinnati Bird Club, and mail to our Treasurer:

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