How Birds Made Us Human

Rob Fergus

March 11 Program

People have been living and interacting with birds since before we were human. Many of the behaviors that we take to be inherently human—including walking upright, using tools, language, writing, music, dance, sewing, pottery, home building, and flight—were perfected by birds long before we became human. This presentation looks at the shared history of humans and birds and how we may have become human by copying these behaviors from birds in our shared environment.

Rob Fergus studies human-bird interactions and received his Ph.D. in geography from the University of Texas at Austin in 2008. Rob is the former executive director of Travis Audubon Society, founder of the Hornsby Bend Bird Observatory in Austin, Texas and National Audubon Senior Scientist for Urban Bird Conservation. He currently teaches geography and environmental studies at Rowan University of Glassboro, New Jersey, and is president of the Birding Club of Delaware County.

Everything You’ve Wanted to Know about Cerulean Warblers (But Were Afraid to Ask)

Scott Stoleson

April 8 Program

This program will summarize what Scott and colleagues have discovered in their studies of this enigmatic bird over the last 16 years. Come and learn about the Ceruleans’ fussy habitat requirements, treetop lifestyle, and recently revealed migration patterns.

(continued on next page)

Our meetings are held at the Clarion Free Library, lower level. Come early to socialize—programs begin at 6:30 pm.
Scott is the Research Wildlife Biologist at the Forest Service’s Northern Research Station in Warren, PA, and a Research Associate of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Jamestown, NY. His current research focuses on the ecology and conservation of Cerulean Warblers and lesser birds in northeastern forests. Scott has published various scientific papers based on research in Pennsylvania, the western U.S., Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Ecuador. He serves on the Pennsylvania Biological Survey’s Ornithological Technical Committee and the Governing Councils of the Association of Field Ornithologists and Eastern Bird Banding Association.

Our calendar from March to June of this year will accomplish those actions.

Officers will be elected in June with a ballot presented to the membership in May. Nominations will be accepted in April.

By-laws will be presented in March and April with a vote to amend in May. The amended By-laws will reflect how our chapter has changed over the last 20 years.

The amendments will achieve the following goals:
1. Align our chapter goals with our national organization
2. Allow our chapter the flexibility to adapt to current challenges and opportunities
3. Direct the establishment of Chapter Membership Policies
4. Direct the establishment of Finance Policies
5. Establish an annual structure to include an Annual Meeting, reporting to our national organization and maintaining our non-profit status.

These changes will be a great help to the current leadership and those who will follow. We have a wonderful chapter with regional resources to explore and inform us about the birds and habitat we care about.

Let’s go!

(Editors Note: Scott has offered our club a field trip to hopefully see a Cerulean Warbler in the hand. May 16, location to be announced.)

Seneca Rocks Audubon Society has a promising future as we head into a new decade. We will continue to provide informative and interesting programs, great birding events and good times together. There happen to be some organizational steps we must take to update our chapter structure that will guide how our chapter functions. We also need to better define membership.

Our action steps in the coming months include:
1. Electing officers
2. Establishing a Membership Policy
3. Reinstating our 501 (c) (3) status
4. Establishing a Finance Policy
5. Amending our By-Laws

Our Chapter Going Forward

- Deb Freed
Programs at Cook Forest State Park

~ Dale Luthringer

Saturday, February 15 at 11:00am - ‘Snowman in the Forest Day’
Come join us for a day of fun wintry activities along the picturesque National Wild & Scenic Clarion river within Cook Forest State Park. Various activities will be held at the new River Shelter by the playground on River Road approximately one mile up-river from the Park Office:

11:30am - lunch provided, Chili Cook-Off (hot & mild divisions)
11:30am-2:30pm - carriage rides, sledding, snowman building, ice skating (ice skates available)
12:00-1:00pm - Snowshoe interpretive hike within the old growth forest along Cook Trail, meet at the new River Shelter
1:00pm - Happy Dog Contest
2:00pm - door prize awards

Come sample the chili during the ‘Free Chili Cook-Off’, that is, after the judges have tried some first. Hot chocolate and coffee will be on hand to help take the chill out of your bones. Enjoy a wonderful day among family and friends in Cooksburg’s winter wonderland. Event sponsored by the Cook Forest Vacation Bureau. (4 hrs)

Saturday, February 22 at 7:30am - ‘Otter Watch’
Please bring your binoculars and spotting scopes to the Park Office for a driving tour to otter hotspots along the National Wild & Scenic Clarion River. This is the prime time of the year to witness otter activity. Chances are good to observe otter signs such as slides, tracks, and carp kills along the banks of the river. Hot chocolate and coffee will be available at the Park Office to warm us up. Maybe we’ll even get a chance to see a river otter romp in action! (4 hrs)

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

~ Debbie McCanna

Seneca Rocks CBC day was January 4, 2020. It was a wet, cloudy (and muddy) day with rather poor visibility, but we are intrepid - eight teams of field observers and 22 feeder watchers joined to observe 47 species and a total of 5131 birds in our 7.5 mile circle. Field observers logged over 500 miles on foot and by car; feeder watchers spent about 59 hours at their windows, and the owl watchers logged over 50 miles and six hours of nocturnal prowling.
It wasn’t an exceptionally good day—the feeder watchers reported lower counts than they expected, and the field birds were hunkered down. We spotted seven fewer species but 97 more birds than last year (species Wood Duck, Bufflehead, Northern Pintail, Great Blue Heron and Common Merganser were missing from the local waters, and no Great Horned Owls or Yellow Bellied Sapsuckers were seen.)

When we gathered for the Tally Luncheon, we talked at length about the nuts and bolts of the CBC. We have lost some of our dedicated birders in the last few years, and we need feeder watchers in various areas. The roads have changed a little, and some of the Sections have become harder to patrol—it takes longer to look at brushy, overgrown areas, and a number of farms in the circle are no longer worked, so the fields have grown up as well as the ditch areas, etc.

We plan to sit down with our maps and look at the changes, and check GoogleEarth for hints and helps. During the summer, volunteers will be driving the Sections to see if they need to be reapportioned. And, we thought, why not hold a “Practice” CBC - we can train new volunteers, check the Section and Circle boundaries, and get an idea for places to park and turn around (sometimes a little difficult when there is snow on the ground and you’re on a “No Winter Maintenance” dirt road!)

So—if you’d like to take part in the next Christmas Bird Count, tell us what you’d be willing to do to help. Would you enjoy a Practice CBC—a day out to see the routes with a seasoned observer? If so, would you like to be a spotter, a recorder or a driver (or share the jobs)? Would you be a Feeder Watcher - we have suggestions for feeders, feeds, field guides and fun things to do while you’re watching, alone or with a small team.

Even if you don’t live within the CBC Circle, you can “invade” the Circle and help make our counts as accurate as possible. Think about it, and check out the CBC Website at netapp.audubon.org for some great videos and more information about the CBC and why it is vitally important to the world’s birds. If you want to become part of what Gary Edwards calls “The Most Wonderful Day of the Year,” contact Debbie McCanna at dmcc1018@windstream.net or 724-526-5693. If there is enough interest, we’ll schedule a Practice CBC and get the word out!

2019 CBC:
Northern Harrier Craziness
~ Ron Montgomery

Setting

A few years ago, Mal Hays and Larry Towse discovered a new area to find Short-eared Owls on the CBC. It is a roughly a 25 to 30-acre grassy tract that is probably a recently reclaimed strip mine. The main feature is a roundish grassy mound which sits on top of a natural hill. The mound has erosion dikes that lead to small ponds at the north end of the area. This hotspot is less than 2 miles
south of Callensburg and easily distinguishable on Google Maps.

**Experience**

It was a dark and stormy evening! Our intrepid team of Mal, Larry and me completed our day-time birding a little before 5PM, so that we’d have time to see any harriers hunting on the feature before the evening shift of Short-eared Owls took over. Actually, we got there early by accident but have decided to take credit for good planning because of how well it turned out. We split up into two cars so we could look at the feature from both sides. We had walkie-talkies to avoid double counting. Mal positioned himself on the east side, and Larry and I took the west side. We immediately saw a few harriers hunting or perched on the mound. Wow! Good start. One rather stationary log on the side of the mound required that I get my scope set up to determine whether it was actually a harrier. It was a harrier, by the way. But while my freezing fingers fought with my scope, Larry began to excitedly describing a flock of harriers coming in at relatively high altitude just to the north of the mound.

We were confident that there were at least 3 on or near the mound before the newcomers arrived and the five incoming birds were easy to count. We saw eight at one time! During this time Mal reported two harriers flying in from the east and straight toward us. We did not count them as we could not be sure they were new. We watched as harriers seemed to swarm over the mound, but then noticed that as a group they seemed to be sinking lower around the mound and eventually there were none. While we did not see them actually settle, they seemed to disappear into an artificial groove in the mound that contained an erosion dike. We saw only one bird leave the area going west.

As the dark and stormy part of the experience arrived in the form of a very heavy snow squall, Larry somehow spotted a Short-eared Owl. Visibility was about over but I was able to follow Larry’s owl to a point where it interacted with another owl near the ground. Two Owls! And eight harriers! Over all we had three owls and 12 harriers for the day.

Gary Edwards, Mal and I went to the same location a couple of weeks later and, while we had several sightings of harriers, we never saw as many at one time as we had on the CBC. We did, however, see a harrier or two almost all the time we were there. We saw at least three separate birds, however, because we had a juvenile, a male and a female. Good location! At least for the time being.

**Children’s Nature Books for Local Libraries**

~ Paulette Colantonio

Seneca Rocks Audubon and the Clarion County Garden Club have purchased books for ten libraries in Clarion County this fall. In addition, Seneca Rocks donated titles to four libraries outside the county. The librarians chose books from a list including four fiction and six nonfiction titles. The organizations donated 56 titles total.

The four fiction titles are *The Song of Spring*, *The Pigeon HAS to Go to School*, *Gull Beach*, and *Owl Diaries: Eva’s Treetop Festival*. 

Like us on Facebook!  
https://www.facebook.com/SenecaRocksAudubon
Hendrik Jonas, a German author and illustrator, offers a sweet seasonal book in *The Song of Spring*, replete with collage and recycled paper illustrations. It is wonderful spring and “the birds begin to sing, whistle, and chirp so they can attract some friends.” However, one small bird with spiked crest feathers has forgotten his unique tune. A delightful barnyard-like plot unfolds as he tries a woof, an oink, a moo and so on with all the appropriate barnyard fellows appearing at the bird’s tree! Finally, the six new friends ponder the little feathered creature’s dilemma. The facial expressions on each animal conveying deep thought on this topic presented on a double-page spread are humorous. (The bird is in the illustration, too, but you must look carefully). Suddenly the silence is interrupted with a “deafening sound: Parp!” So enters the little female bird “looking for a friend” also. Very young children and early elementary students will enjoy this happy romp written on a Grade 1.6 Reading Level.

With sincerity and humor, Mo Willems explores the anxiety and emotional upheaval children experience before attending school for the first time in *The Pigeon HAS to Go to School*, the second fiction offering. Obstinate body postures accompany large dialogue bubbles as Pigeon boasts, “I already know EVERYTHING!” More blustering ensues about not liking morning and what if “I REALLY don’t like it” (school)? Then, Pigeon has a very disconcerting thought. “What if the teacher doesn’t like pigeons?” The feathered character finally admits in small text with very small pigeon drawings, “I’m scared.” This courageous revelation opens a litany of questions for parents and children to examine. Some are serious such as “What will the other birds THINK of me?” and some are funny; “WILL FINGER PAINT stick to my feathers?” The book ends with an enthusiastic Pigeon running to catch the familiar yellow school bus featured in Willems’s other books in this series. Students and parents familiar with the series will enjoy the end page artwork of empty desks in the front and the same desks with characters from other Pigeon books sitting in the classroom in the back. Children from Kindergarten to grade three will appreciate this gem read aloud or enjoyed independently. It is written on a Grade 1.9 Reading Level.

Next, a picturesque shoreline habitat in Massachusetts is the setting for *On Gull Beach*, the third book in a series by Jane Yolen and illustrator Bob Marstall, published by Cornell Lab. Utilizing rhyming couplets, the author captures the antics as a young boy rescues a sea star from a band of lively herring gulls. Marstall’s watercolor illustrations support the action but include more shore wildlife for the observant reader. For instance, what are the white birds with bright yellow feet? What is the large creature that looks like a helmet and sports a spike-like tail? In the backmatter, budding naturalists will discover information about Herring gulls, willets, sanderlings, and snowy egrets. The sea star is presented along with intriguing paragraphs about horseshoe, hermit, Jonah, and fiddler crabs. (The bird pictures also have an adjoining barcode to scan to hear each avian participant’s song). Stewardship ideas to help beaches and wildlife complete the back notes. The body of the book is for young primary readers, written on a Grade 2.7 Reading Level. However, the backmatter is more difficult and suited to intermediate readers.

*Eva’s Treetop Festival* is the last fiction selection this year. Eva Wingdale is energetic, artistic, fun-loving, and a perfectionist. She likes to wear berets that compliment her ensembles. Oh, by the way, she’s an owl! Mrs. Featherbottom, her
teacher, gives Eva permission to organize the first Bloomtastic Festival at Treetop Owlementary School to celebrate the arrival of spring. She also encourages the owlet to delegate responsibilities for such a large endeavor, as all her classmates have special talents and want to help.

However, Eva makes her lists and begins to work on every aspect of the carnival alone. She is, after all, a perfectionist. Fatigue and worry soon settle in as she realizes she does indeed need help from her classmates. Will they help her after she treated them poorly? Do they have enough time to succeed? This book is one of a series written and illustrated by Rebecca Elliot. Digital illustrations, large print, lots of color, and a scrapbook-like appearance make this chapter book for emergent readers very appealing. This selection will appeal to young girls embarking on longer books with an appealing smaller physical size. The book is 5.2 X 7.8 inches and is written on a 3.3 Reading Level.

(This article will be continued in our next issue, with discussion of the six non-fiction titles).

**Clarion County Fall 2019 Bird Sightings**

~ Carole Winslow

Locations: Armstrong Trail (AT), Cook Forest (CF), Curllsville (CV), Kahle Lake (KL), Mt Zion (SGL330/Piney Tract)(MZ), New Bethlehem (NB), Redbank Valley Trail (RVT).

The first species for this season is one not often reported, a **Trumpeter Swan**, and this particular bird was first noted in *Jefferson* and *Forest*, on the Clarion River 9/7. It was then reported near Leeper in *Clarion*, further down the river 9/29 (DS). The bird had a yellow wing tag, was reported to the Trumpeter Swan Society, and found to be a young female from 2017 that was first tagged at LaSalle Park, Burlington, ON in January 2018. At this same location on that date, a significant number of **Common Mergansers** was also found, with 70 birds reported together (DS). A large group of this same species was also noted on Redbank Creek near NB, with 34 found together there 9/19 (J&AK). They have been found successfully breeding at this southern border previously. There was just a single report of **Ruffed Grouse**, a lone bird recorded near Lucinda 11/30 (ES).

Once again this year, a **Common Nighthawk** watch was done along the Clarion River at Millcreek Boat Launch (MH, LT, TS, PC, FM, et al.). The watch was completed from 8/15-9/8 during the last two hours before dark and totaled 560 birds for the season. The highest total of birds was during the week of 8/28-9/3, with a weekly total of 378 birds. This was the lowest total for the past two years, with a high of 710 in 2018. At this same location along the Clarion River, **Spotted Sandpipers** were found along the shore, with 7 birds present 8/22 (MH, FM, LT). One was also reported along Redbank Creek from 8/1-8/7 (MD, J&AK, MM).

**Osprey** were reported in higher numbers than usual with the first along the RVT at St Charles 8/10 (J&AK). One was seen at Millcreek on the Clarion River 8/23 (MH, TS, LT, CW), and further up the river at Gravel Lick 9/6 (FM). One was also seen
late in the season near CV 10/10 (CW). **Northern Harriers** were only reported from various areas in southern Clarion. A male was present near CV on Rankin Rd and nearby Over Rd on 9/19, 10/17 and 11/20 (DD, CW). One was also seen in CV 10/17-10/18, and 11/15 (DD, CW). A male was noted near Frogtown in open farmfields 11/7 (T&JK). The first **Rough-legged Hawk** of the season, a light morph, was found in open field areas near Marianne 11/23 (MC). Another winter visitor that frequents the open fields, **Short-eared Owl** was first reported on Rankin Rd near CV, where 2 birds were found at dusk 11/20 (DD, CW). A dedicated observer made efforts to survey for owls at multiple sites throughout the county over ten separate nights between 10/7-11/30 (MH). This resulted in a total of 39 **Eastern Screech Owls**, four **Barred Owls**, and one **Great Horned Owl**, a very nice total to provide additional knowledge about owl numbers in Clarion. Reports from the falcon family are rather few and far between, but this year a **Merlin** was found near Frogtown 10/4 (DR), and a **Peregrine Falcon** was reported near CV 9/16 (CW).

**Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** are always a good find for the season, and this year there were three reports which is unusual. A rather early bird was seen near Rimersburg on the RVT 8/30 (MH, RH, FM), and another one also on the RVT near Redbank 9/9 (TR). The last was found near CV 9/16 (CW). Along the same trail near Lawsonham, a late **Acadian Flycatcher** was found still singing 8/20 (CW). **Yellow-throated Vireo** is a species not frequently found during migration, but three at CF may have been late breeders, reported there 8/30-8/31 (LB). Another vireo always worth a mention is **Philadelphia Vireo**, and one was reported near CV 9/9 (CW).

**Gray-cheeked Thrush** are the least reported thrush in migration but this year they were found on two occasions calling clearly on the ground at dawn near CV 9/27 and 10/1, during their typical migration period (CW). **Swainson’s Thrush** were found in good numbers near CV also with 4 birds 9/9 (CW), and near Clarion on the North Country Trail with 5 seen 9/21 (TS). Over the course of several weeks in late September and early October, nocturnal flight call surveys were done near CV, documenting the passage of thrushes in migration (CW). Starting on 9/17, Swainson’s thrush were heard in just moderate numbers as they started their primary migration period. On 9/27 numbers of Swainson’s increased to approximately 600 calls in calm conditions, along with increasing numbers of **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, with 20-30 calls heard, and **Wood Thrush** numbering around 80 calls. Wood Thrush were still finishing their migration 10/1, with a few flight calls and two heard calling on the ground after the flight finished. Four or five Gray-cheeked thrush were still heard on this date as well as several Swainson’s. The last flight call survey was done 10/5 and 24 Swainson’s calls were heard as their migration period starts to wind down along with four gray-cheeked, whose migration period extends later into fall.

**American Pipit** is often missing from the seasonal reports, but this year one was seen during a snow squall in town in Clarion 11/12 (TS). A small flock of 25 was also reported in the fields around KL 11/14 (RN, CW). In fall **Savannah Sparrows** are possibly
missed by birders as they often occur in mixed flocks in fields. This year nine were found near Clarion 10/5 (DR), and one rather late in a mixed flock in weedy fields near CV 10/20 (CW). Also this year several good migration days for Lincoln’s Sparrow with a single bird reported on five separate days in shrubby field habitat near CV between 10/2-10/18 (CW). Bobolinks in fall are sometimes hard to identify for beginning birders and often missed as they fly over in flocks during migration. Just one was reported at the MZ grasslands 8/18 (ML), and 2 were present in fields near CV 8/24 (CW).

Several warblers are worthy of mention with the first being one regularly missing from migration reports. This was an Orange-crowned Warbler found in shrubby field edges near CV 10/18, during their typical migration period as they are one of the latest warblers to pass through (CW). Black-throated Blue Warblers were found more frequently with up to four birds seen at SGL 63 between 9/15-9/29 (DP, TS). At this same location another difficult fall warbler was noted, a Pine Warbler 9/29 (TS). A single Yellow-throated Warbler was still singing at a breeding site near East Brady on the AT early in migration season 8/2 (CW). Also very interesting to find was Black-throated Green Warbler along the RVT near Rimersburg still feeding young ones 8/23 (MHi, RH). At this same location and date, a single Canada Warbler was also reported (MHi, RH). The last warbler of note is listed due to its sporadic showing from year to year, a single Wilson’s Warbler found in Clarion 9/29 (TS).

Observers: Carole Winslow, 814-745-3818, cjwinslow94@gmail.com, Lisa Blazure, Martin Carlin, Pat Conway, Lewis Crowell, Michael David, Don DeWolf, Mal Hays, Margaret Higbee (MHi), Roger Higbee, John and Avis Keener, Tom and Janet Kuehl, Michael Lyman, Flo McGuire, Mark Moore, Richard Nugent, David Poortinga, Doug Raybuck, Theo Rickert, Éric Schill, Tabassam Shah, Daria Sockey, Larry Towse.

Wilson’s Snipe is a possibility on this trip—photo by Carole Winslow

Custards/Geneva Marsh Field Trip

Our ever popular annual field trip to the wetlands, marshes and farm fields of Custards, Geneva and Pymatuning will take place on Saturday, March 21st, 2020. As usual, meet the trip leader, Michael Leahy at the bridge on Mercer Pike Road in Custards at 8:00 am. We will scan the area for waterfowl, Eagles and anything else that might show up. We plan to proceed from that area around 9:00 am in a caravan to visit several other areas looking for whatever we can find of interest. We normally stop for lunch in Conneaut Lake before proceeding to the Pymatuning area to find some exciting species in that area.

The trip usually concludes around 2:00 or 3:00 pm but everyone is welcome to come and go as they please. Please be reminded that the weather can be unpredictable at this time of year and the areas that we plan to survey can be windy so plan to wear layers. A hooded parka, hat, boots and gloves would be beneficial to bring along. If you have any 2-way radios bring them along, I’ll try to communicate birds we see to the other vehicles as we travel along. Please try to car pool with others so that we can minimize the number of vehicles. I will probably have room for two or three others in my vehicle. Feel free to contact me with any question that you may have. Call or text me at 814-229-1648 or email – mrl706@gmail.com
Upcoming Dates & Events

March 21 - Conneaut Marsh Outing
April/May - Spring big Sit
May 9 - Warbler Walk Oil Creek State Park
May 9-17 - Birdathon
May 16 - Ceruleans Up Close
June - Rail 66 Public Bird Walk

Leadership Team

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“All we have, it seems to me, is the beauty of art and nature and life, and the love which that beauty inspires.”

― Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West*