

November — December 2008

No. 134

WETLAND *matters*

Published bi-monthly for the Friends and Members of Oxbow, Inc.

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It's Great Outdoors (just try to stay on your feet)

.....by Jon Seymour

Cincinnati Enquirer Weather Forecast Sunday September 14, 2008: Mostly cloudy today with a shower or thunderstorm, breezy and humid. A passing thundershower this evening. Not as warm tomorrow.

The weekend of September 27-28 was bright and beautiful and was perfect for the Great Outdoor Weekend (GOW). However, that was not the only thing on folks' minds that week. On Sunday the 14th of September the Greater Cincinnati Area was hit by what was essentially a tropical storm with Category 1 Hurricane wind gusts. The highest reported gusts were 84 miles per hour and the Cincinnati Airport averaged the sustained winds at 55 miles per hour (Tropical Storm level). As everyone who lived through the storm knows, this played havoc with most of the trees and power lines across the entire tri-state area. The strong winds blew for nearly 6 hours and there was hardly a drop of rain that whole time. Coming out of Sunday's storm there were a lot of other things on people's minds besides the Great Outdoor Weekend.

One of the first tasks for the Oxbow was to determine what damage was done in the Oxbow property. Inspection on the Wednesday following the storm found numerous limbs and branches down in the wooded areas the roads passed through but hardly any were large enough to cause road problems. There were two areas where tree trunks snapped and blocked the road, but those areas were cleared over the next week.

On Tuesday the 23rd we had a tour with the Llanfair tour bus with about 25 people on the bus. While many folks do not envision the Oxbow as a place for a retirement community's tour bus to be poking around, this is actually the second time we have had the Llanfair tour bus and both times it was very successful. Some folks stayed on the bus the entire time while many got off at each stop to hear descriptions of the wildlife at the Oxbow and view some of it up close through a 60 power spotting scope. While nothing unusual popped up for us to look at, the egrets, cormorants, and herons offered a great deal of entertainment for the passengers. The road improvements made over this summer made those roads much easier to drive and we are hearing many compliments on their condition. We will wait until our next storm to see how they hold up once the road is wet and the gravel starts to sink in.

As the Great Outdoor Weekend approached I was asked if we needed to cancel our GOW program due to the

Sept. 14th storm. We said no but we later learned that some organizations did have to cancel due to extreme storm damage. The GOW weekend was hectic to say the least. On Saturday morning the Masters class in Environmental Studies from Miami University in Oxford toured the Oxbow to learn about the effectiveness and issues facing a grass roots environmental group modeled by Oxbow, Inc. This is a yearly course for Miami University and it is always a great pleasure to interact with these young environmentalists on the cusp of their new careers.

Immediately following the Miami University tour we had the Grand Opening of our office and meeting space at 301 Walnut St. in downtown Lawrenceburg. From now on most of our educational meetings and board meetings will be held at 301 Walnut St. We will continue to have some educational meetings on the north and west sides of town as we are able. While we had several visitors for our Grand Opening, the City of Lawrenceburg was having its annual street fair on the same day and parking and maneuvering in and around our office was difficult at best. Velda Miller and Jackie Seymour made cookies and those that sampled them came back for more. Some folks that had come for the street fair stopped in to ask about Oxbow and went away with a new appreciation of what lay just on the other side of the levee from Lawrenceburg.

The Grand Opening ended at 5 p.m. and we packed up, ate a little supper and met the 6 p.m. GOW tour group at the entrance parking area. Kani Meyer, Steve Pelikan and I led 13 people around the Oxbow until sundown. About half were children and we worked hard to try to give them an exciting experience. Everyone seemed to have a great time.

Sunday morning we were back at the Oxbow bright and early for the GOW tour. While we had a pretty ordinary day with heron, egrets, and cormorants leading the way, there was one exciting moment when a peregrine falcon strafed the shoreline of Jackpot Pond and sent all the shorebirds scattering. Just across the valley at the Shawnee Lookout boat ramp Jay Stenger and Paul Wharton were leading an Audubon group and having a big day, one and half miles away from us on the other side of the flood plain. See Jay's article on Page 10 to learn what the excitement was about. I recalled what Dave Styer has said several times. There are more things going on in the oxbow floodplain than we know about. There are never enough observers in the floodplain to get a complete picture of what is going on at any one point in time. Having two groups in the floodplain at the same time such as Jay's Audubon group and our GOW group shows the great diversity of experiences that are available in the Oxbow.

Oxbow Inc. PROGRAMS

Tuesday, November 11, 2008, 7:30 p.m.
301 Walnut St. Lawrenceburg
The Oxbow, Inc. Office

OXBOW'S DINOSAURS—Birds are the living relatives of the dinosaurs. "Descent by Modification" over millions of years has established the birds as living dinosaurs. Through the sources of evidence from Paleontology, Embryology, Anatomy and Genetics we can demonstrate the evolutionary process of T. REX to Chickens. Join Jack Berninger, retired biology teacher with a Masters Degree Xavier University, for a discussion of the dinosaurs among us. Jack leads local field trips and does some endangered plant population research in the Fakahatchee State Park in Florida. Jack will bring some hands on items to accompany his presentation.

No Member Meeting in December
Have a Wonderful Holiday Season!

Tuesday, January 13, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
301 Walnut St. Lawrenceburg
The Oxbow, Inc. Office

Learn about the early written history of the Oxbow through the eyes and lives of such larger than life characters such as John Cleves Symmes and William Henry Harrison. Discover the unique history of Fort Finney and its critical role in the formation of the United States of America. Tom Strohfeltd, former curator of the Ohio Historical Society, is a student of frontier history and is an avid hiker and canoer. He worked at Williamsburg, VA for ten years as a trained rifle maker. He has published 47 articles on the American frontier.

(To get to the Oxbow, Inc. Office take Highway US 50 south from the #16 exit of I-275. Pass the Argosy exit and turn left at the second stop light onto Walnut St. 301 Walnut is on the right side at the second stop light where Walnut changes from two way to one way. Free parking is available on Walnut St., Center St., and in the parking lot behind the building.)

Oxbow Inc. FIELD TRIPS

Sunday, November 23, 2008, 8:00 a.m.
Leaders: Jack & Jay Stenger, (513) 522-8147
jaystenger@cinci.rr.com

Meet in the upper Oxbow parking lot at the main entrance just beyond the cement plant.

The formula of the month is November + the Oxbow = ducks. Fall waterfowl migration should be at peak so that will be our primary focus on this morning visit to the Oxbow. Many other species can also be found during this time of the year as well. Gulls, grebes, Bald Eagles, other raptors and numerous winter resident songbirds should all be around and even Sandhill Cranes are possible at this season. Get in the outdoor spirit of the Thanksgiving season and join us for what should be a good day in the Oxbow area. The weather at this time of year is unpredictable and there's a good chance we will find some mud so come prepared and dress accordingly. Contact Jack or Jay if you have any questions.

No Field Trip in December
Have a Wonderful Holiday Season!



Goldilocks, Ohio and the More than Three Bears



After several false starts we were finally able to pull off the program reporting on the state of the American Black Bear in Ohio. Kathy Garza-Behr from the Ohio

DNR was injured last time we scheduled this program and this time she was ordered by her bosses to present a program somewhere else at the time we had scheduled. Rather than messing it completely up again she persuaded Josh Zeintek the Hamilton County DNR representative to give the program for her. There were a lot of hands-on displays for us to touch. Claws, casts of skulls, casts of footprints, and skins were passed around to allow us to gain some familiarity with the Black Bear in a very safe way. We learned about some of the habits and habitats of Black Bear life and how these traits can bring them into direct contact with people. Normally shy and unwilling to meet people they can be extremely dangerous if cornered or provoked. In 2006, 113 bears were sighted and the numbers have been increasing ever since. Most sightings are in the counties bordering Pennsylvania or West Virginia but they have been sighted in Clermont County and in Boone County, KY. Are we likely to encounter a Black

Bear in a Hamilton County Park or in the Oxbow? Not at the moment, but maybe in the not too distant future. After all we have intermittent and recent sightings of beaver, coyote, fox, deer, and otter. Why not a Black Bear next?

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10th Anniversary!

Conservation Corner

.....by Jon Seymour

There are two ways to apply conservation to land. One is to superimpose some particular practice upon the pre-existing system of land-use, without regard to how it fits or what it does to or for other interests involved. The other is to reorganize and gear up the farming, forestry, game cropping, scenery, or whatever values may be involved so that they collectively comprise a harmonious balanced system of land-use. Aldo Leopold, Coon Valley: An Adventure in Cooperative Conservation (1935).

From September 19-21 I attended the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) national rally (convention) in Pittsburgh, PA. In all, four other Oxbow members attended who were all representing other local area land trusts. The LTA is a national alliance of Land Trusts all over the country (over 1500) that like Oxbow, Inc. hold land in the public trust. We are viewed as holding land in the public trust due to our status as a 501(c) 3 non profit organization.

The LTA at its annual rally provides a wide variety of training and learning opportunities for members, board members, and employees of Land Trusts. Many of these topics are of direct interest to Oxbow, Inc. Courses were offered in over 20 different topic lines most with multiple classes in the same topic line. A total of 36 half day or all day seminars and 127 one and a half hour classes were offered. Obviously the attendees had to pick and choose the seminars and classes that were most beneficial to their immediate needs.

I did not attend the conference on the first two days when the longer and more intensive seminars were offered but attended on the weekend to pick up several of the offered classes. I attended classes in the topic lines: Connecting Land and People; Fundraising, Membership and Outreach; Public Policy; Land Protection; Guiding Land Trust Success.

I have always found these offerings very useful and Oxbow, Inc. members representing other land trusts often exchange copies of our syllabus of the classes we attend. We also have the opportunity to meet a lot of Land Conservation professionals who have useful information and contacts for future

needs and projects. While we consider ourselves just a grassroots group with a passion for saving the oxbow area, the reality is that we are a complex land trust with complex issues.

We are the owners of over 800 acres of property and have responsibility for another 230 acres of conservation easements. All this property must be monitored and defended to maintain its value to wildlife and to uphold the purpose of the organization. We interact with several dynamic government groups that all have special needs, concerns, and desires. These groups are as diverse as the Indiana DNR, the Indiana DOT, Greendale, Lawrenceburg, Dearborn County, US Army Corp of Engineers, Hamilton County Park District, and the IRS to name a few. On average we spend about \$30,000 a year on education, security, land maintenance, legal issues, real estate taxes, insurance, maintenance of membership, fund raising, and board member training. We take in about \$36,000 a year in income from farm leases that are negotiated with three different farmers. We hire services to maintain the road system, provide security, provide legal advice, and print our educational newsletter. We interact with a wide variety of other organizations with similar interests such as The Friends of the Great Miami, ORSANCO, Rivers Unlimited, the Hamilton County Park District, University of Cincinnati, College of Mount St. Joseph, and the Lawrenceburg Conservancy District to name a few that we do joint projects with.

It becomes obvious that we have become more than just a grassroots organization that rallied for a good cause. We have become land stewards with responsibilities for holding land in the public trust. We have become a conservation business with over \$1,500,000 in land assets (and that's at yesterday's prices). We are educators by choice and by mandate of our non profit status. We are in the business of accumulating funds to complete the purchase of the remaining floodplain (currently estimated at \$1,500,000 and climbing). We are in the business of creating an endowment that will support the perpetual care and protection of the land we obtain. We have already started to act more like a conservation business. The support, training, experience, and contacts provided by the national association LTA will really help us make the right decisions and move in the proper directions to establish a safe and secure future for Oxbow, Inc.

Election Time Again

Our January Members Meeting will be held Tuesday, January 13, 2009 at the new office at 301 Walnut St. in Lawrenceburg. We will hold our annual elections at the meeting and we hope as many members as possible will attend to conduct this important part of the annual business of Oxbow, Inc.

Standing for Officer Positions:

- President - Jon Seymour
- Vice-President – John Getzendanner
- Secretary – Dwight Poffenberger
- Treasurer – Jim Poehlmann
- Indiana Agent – John Getzendanner
- Ohio Agent – Dwight Poffenberger

Standing for election to a three year term on the Board ending in February 2012:

- Denis Conover
- Dennis Mason
- Kani Meyer
- Richard Pope
- David Styer

Coral Reefs In Peril

Kani Meyer, Oxbow Board Member and one-time marine biologist, still keeps up with the health of coral reefs and recently attended an International Coral Reef Symposium in Ft. Lauderdale. Through her own observations and information obtained during this meeting, she reports that there are many issues concerning impacts on coral reefs due to pollution, habitat destruction, over fishing and global climate change. Runoff from development in coastal areas combined with pollution from factories and rivers is destroying coastal areas that provide 20% of our oxygen as well as providing a food source for a large portion of the world's population. As human populations expand, reef fish are over-exploited as food and catches are becoming smaller. Destruction of fringing mangrove habitats destroys our barriers to storm surges as well as the nurseries for many of the reef fish while global warming is stressing corals making them more susceptible to a multiple number of diseases. Warming waters also cause the expulsion of symbiotic algae which provide nutrients to the corals and assist them in forming their skeletons. Clearly, the human impact on reefs is causing many changes that threaten one of the most species diverse ecosystems on our planet.

Oxbow, Inc. Memorials & Honorariums

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Deborah Wissman	Lawrence Wissman



Oxbow, Inc. would like to thank:

George and Jean Perbix

for their generous gift

Oxbow, Inc. has established Memorials in honor of those who have passed on. Each Memorial established in the name of a friend or relative will be enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Each contribution to a Memorial will be acknowledged to the family or to those selected by the donor.

Tributes are also enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Some tributes are birthday or anniversary remembrances, holiday greetings or gratitude acknowledgements. If so desired, "Happy Birthday!" or the like can be inscribed in the tribute notice.

Contributions should be sent to: Oxbow, Inc., P. O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, OH 45243-0391. Be sure to enclose the names and addresses of those who are to receive the acknowledgement.



Llanfair retirement community bus riders relax on the Oxbow Lake overlook benches and check out the lake for passing wildlife. The dry weather and the graveled roads allowed the Llanfair bus to reach Mercer Pond and take the Shell to Slot tour during their fall afternoon visit. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



Llanfair residents use the shade of the bus for cooling in the unusual heat of a fall afternoon. Each rider was able to view wildlife through a 20-60X zoom spotting scope. In this case the scope was trained on a congregation of 25 Great Blue Herons and about 20 Great Egret. An impressive mass of birds on any Oxbow day. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



Members of the Ohio Valley Photographers Club, an internet meet-up group of folks with an interest in photography look around the south fields of the Oxbow in April 2008. This was the first of two tours the photographers took in the Oxbow in 2008. On both trips they were treated to the sight of a Bald Eagle in the Oxbow. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



Children from the Cincinnati Montessori High School spent a bright May day in the Oxbow this year. Other classmates had taken the school field trip to Florida but the students coming to the Oxbow had, for one reason or another, been unable to make the trip. The Oxbow substituted for Florida and the kids had views of herons, egrets, ducks, and cormorants. In fact they probably learned more about these typical southern birds than their classmates and had a good time to boot. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



The Ohio Valley Photographers Club on their August visit to the Oxbow. The group saw an American Bald Eagle on Mercer Pond. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



Another poor digiscope photo by Jon. With all the photographers around Jon put his 3 meg HP Camera to the eyepiece of his telescope and took the above picture. While a bit blurry it shows an adult American Bald Eagle sitting in the trees above Mercer Pond. *(photo by Jon Seymour)*



Of all the photos that Ken Geiger took of the otters this summer this is my favorite. "It is a Big World Out There" shows three young otters staring into a blurry green world beyond their safe shelter. Soon they will be exploring that world with their parents as guides. The presence of a family of young breeding otters in the Oxbow is a sign of the improved, recovered and protected habitat for these active charming creatures. They can usually find all the food they need in less than one hour of hunting each day. After that the other 23 hours are devoted to sleep and play. Otters are one of the few animals that actually seem to play to just enjoy themselves. This may be one of the reasons that we humans are so fascinated by them. . . (photo by Ken Geiger)



usings

by Dave Styer

The White-breasted Nuthatch: A Story with a Twist

Nuthatches are known as the birds that creep headfirst in any direction on tree trunks and limbs. E. Thomas Gilliard wrote, in *Living Birds of the World*, "although they are extremely capable as climbers, even using the short legs and long, strong toes and talons to walk upside down like a fly on a ceiling, they never use the tail as a brace as do the woodpeckers and creepers." A stiff tail seems like a good idea as a prop when climbing up a tree trunk, but not when climbing down a trunk headfirst.

Two nuthatch species occur in the Oxbow area (and in the Greater Cincinnati area). The Red-breasted Nuthatch appears sometimes during fall or spring migration. The White-breasted Nuthatch is a permanent resident on Shawnee Lookout, but it is often more common in the winter. These nuthatches are seen some in the trees lining the edge of the Oxbow, but larger numbers are almost always seen in the woods.

On the Shawnee Lookout portion of the Hamilton County Park District bird count on December 11, 1982 Art and Ginny Wiseman tallied 67 White-breasted Nuthatches. The nuthatches were more or less all over the Shawnee Lookout woods that winter. In the summer you might find five pairs if you really worked at it. For a bird species that lives all year throughout its range this suggests a remarkable amount of movement within its range.

The bird family, Sittidae, of nuthatches and their nearest relatives is centered in Eurasia, with only 4 species in the new world (White-breasted, Red-breasted, Brown-headed, and Pygmy). In spite of the vast forests of South America, no nuthatch family bird lives there. This is probably a fact of history: when and where the nuthatch family evolved it was not likely plausible to expand into South America.

Nuthatches nest in cavities such as woodpecker holes or natural holes. The European relatives of the nuthatches put mud around the nest cavity entrance, sometimes even building a short tunnel. This behavior is lost in our nuthatches. However, White-breasted Nuthatches have been observed spreading

noxious insect secretions in and around their nest. This might be interpreted as a related behavior. Both behaviors presumably help protect the nest.

In *The Birds of North America* article on the White-breasted Nuthatch (1993), Pravosudov and Grubb state: "Despite this species' wide distribution and year-round presence in North America, its biology is not well known. Why this lack of information for such a common species? In part, because these nuthatches prefer to breed in natural holes in large, old trees, so their nests are often difficult to examine." To bring this lack of study closer to home, I quote Mengel in *The Birds of Kentucky* (1965). "Few nests of the White-breasted Nuthatch have been found in Kentucky and none examined in detail. The breeding status of the species in most areas thus rests on no evidence other than the constant presence of the birds, which appear to nest rather early."

Although I have enjoyed watching nuthatches walk headfirst down tree trunks, I can't say that I ever saw their feet well enough to know exactly how they were holding on. For one thing, their bodies get in the way of observation. Like all songbirds, nuthatches have three forward toes and one hind toe. Bird legs, like ours, can't seem to rotate around backwards. Thus, the following description, in the classic *Birds of Massachusetts* (1929), by E. H. Forbush, seems implausible: "They seem to have taken lessons of the squirrel which runs down the tree head first, stretching out hind feet backward and so clinging to the bark with his claws as he goes down; but the nuthatch having only two feet has to reach forward under its breast with one and back beside its tail with the other, and thus, standing on a wide base and holding safely to the bark with the three fore claws of the upper foot turned backward it hitches nimbly down the tree headfirst—something that other birds hardly attempt – and it runs around the trunk in the same way with feet wide apart." White-breasted Nuthatch photos on the Internet seem to show that Forbush was right! Some photos clearly show the trailing leg of the nuthatch going down a tree, and their toes (3, I think) are in back, instead of in front. Maybe if you go out and watch really carefully, you will be able to confirm this.



Ohio River Christmas Bird Count

Compiler: Paul Wharton, (513) 353-3403,
pwharton@fuse.net

The National Audubon Society annual Ohio River Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which is also sometimes called the Oxbow CBC, will be conducted on December 20, 2008. We encourage anyone with an interest in birds to participate regardless of your skill level. Beginning and veteran birders alike are all welcome. If you are interested in participating contact Paul Wharton for the meeting time and place and any other questions you might have. Come out and help us census birds in a 15-mile diameter circle that includes all of the Oxbow area and Shawnee Lookout as well as most of southern Dearborn County and a bit of northern Kentucky. Last year 2,052 Christmas Bird Counts were conducted throughout North and Central America and over 57,851 observers took part. For more information about the National Audubon Societies Christmas Bird Counts visit the following website.

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>

About the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts

From December 14, 2008 through January 5, 2009, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Grandmothers and students, soccer moms and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists will head out on an annual mission – often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house in the middle of winter.

These Citizen Scientists are taking action for conservation. By participating in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, they help scientists understand how birds are faring amid unprecedented environmental challenges. The data they collect informs the world about the State of Birds, and provides the information we need to shape their future and ours.

"Each of the citizen scientists who brave snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count make an enormous contribution to conservation," said Geoff LeBaron, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Director.

Last year, thousands of volunteers counted nearly 60 million birds across the Americas and

beyond. Each count occurs in a designated circle, 15 miles in diameter, and is led by an experienced birder, or designated "compiler".

The longest running Citizen Science program in the world, the count originally began on Christmas Day in 1900 when ornithologist and legendary birder Frank Chapman posed an alternative to an earlier traditional holiday "side hunt." Chapman proposed "hunting" birds to record their numbers. Instead of firing a shotgun, now we have an annual snapshot. Decades of data have added up to results envied by other scientists who don't enjoy such a fleet of volunteer help, or creatures as easily seen and counted as birds.

"Counting is the first step in learning how environmental threats are affecting our birds," said LeBaron. The proverbial "canaries in the coal mine," birds provide an early warning indicator of the health of the world we all share.

"Last year these birds sent us a clear message that their fate is determined by human activity more than anything else," said Audubon President John Flicker when announcing WatchList 2007. The using CBC and other data sources, WatchList identified 178 species in the continental U.S. and 39 in Hawaii that are imperiled. The report was based on the latest available research, including the Christmas Bird Count. In June of 2007, CBC results were pivotal to the Common Birds in Decline Report which revealed that some of America's most beloved and familiar birds have taken a nosedive over the past forty years, with some down as much as 80 percent.



Horseshoe Bottoms Diary

Bald Eagles In The Oxbow

September 28, 2008-10-14

.....by Jay Stenger

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. The Oxbow and the Lower Great Miami River Valley are 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.

Over the past ten or so years Bald Eagle populations have been dramatically increasing across North America. During these times of rampant development and habitat loss, species extinction, waning natural resources and global environmental concerns, the recovery of the Bald Eagle stands out as an environmental success story. Anyone observing the natural history of the Oxbow over the past twenty years can attest to this recovery.

In 1995 the US Fish & Wildlife Service reclassified Bald Eagles from "endangered" to "threatened" and they were taken off the list entirely in 2007. This trend of population increase can be seen locally when reviewing bird records from this region and especially from the Oxbow. While not common by any means, Bald Eagles now occur regularly in our region and the Oxbow area provides exceptional foraging habitat for them. It is now not unusual to see one to three Bald Eagles in and around the Oxbow from November through March, but sightings during April through October are also becoming fairly frequent. The previous high number of Bald Eagles reported from the Oxbow area on a single day had been 5, seen by the late Worth Randle. Worth, a notable area naturalist, saw these birds along the Great Miami River between the Oxbow and Shawnee Lookout on 02/27/89. Up to four eagles have been reported in the Oxbow area on several occasions since then.

For the past 21 years I have co-instructed an annual Audubon Society bird identification course which is sponsored by our local Cincinnati chapter. After three Sunday mornings spent in a classroom environment the class always spends a few hours in the field. The Oxbow/Shawnee area is a prime destination for any field trip seeking birds, so on Sunday, September 28, it wasn't too surprising that co-instructor Paul Wharton and I decided to take the class down to the Shawnee Lookout boat ramp

parking lot, which is located directly across the Great Miami River from the Oxbow.

So there we were when Paul pointed out an adult Bald Eagle soaring in the sky above us, and needless to say, we were all thrilled even though it was not totally unexpected. But then a second bird appeared and then a third and everyone was impressed. Wow, three Bald Eagles, two adults and an immature, soaring in effortless circles in a blue sky above us. I was feeling good about the fact that this was a pretty good sighting by any standard, much less for an instructional field workshop. I remember thinking it doesn't get much better than this. But it can. And it did, because that's when this particular sighting went right off the charts. A fourth eagle appeared then a fifth and even a sixth. Then we really had to start paying attention and take stock of the situation. How many eagles are actually up there? A seventh was counted and then an eighth! Our final total was eight Bald Eagles, 6 adults and two immature birds, all in view overhead at the same time. These birds were spaced out and at various altitudes and were soaring in a seemingly lazy fashion in an easterly direction. We watched them for about 10 minutes until they finally disappeared into the distant stratosphere. It was a fairly good day for migrating raptors in general. We also saw two Red-shouldered Hawks, a Merlin and an Osprey, all of which were apparently migrating, but because of the eagle show, those birds almost became an afterthought.

Obviously this was a great sighting but two things about it are particularly remarkable, the date and the sheer number of eagles. Eight birds strongly suggest migrants, yet fall Bald Eagle migration in our region generally begins in late October and continues through early December, with a peak sometime during November. While the first fall migrants may occasionally appear during the last days of September, these instances are rare and usually relate to only one or two birds. But eight Bald Eagles is an unprecedented number for almost any season in our immediate area, during migration or otherwise. There are only two records of sightings of more than eight Bald Eagles from this region and they were both from Brookville Reservoir during the late winter of 2007 when 13 were seen on 2/3/07 and 10 were seen a month later on 3/4/07. That was a particularly hard winter and the lake was almost completely frozen and concentrated both the eagles and their prey (waterfowl and fish) in a relatively small ice-free area. So it's a bit of a mystery and questions as to the origins of these birds, where they came from, what they were doing and why so many on this unexpected date all come to mind. I don't have the answers to these questions and would only be speculating, but one thing I am sure of is that this sighting is additional direct evidence that Bald Eagle populations are certainly increasing.

Prior to European settlement the original breeding range of the Bald Eagle included most of northern

(continued from page 10)

North America throughout Canada and Alaska and the northern tier of the contiguous 48 states including the entire Great Lakes region. Healthy populations also occurred on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts as well as along the Gulf coast and throughout much of the southeastern US. Breeding populations also occurred in the interior US, particularly along major rivers and other large bodies of water. The northern populations are highly migratory. When northern lakes and rivers began to freeze over, Bald Eagles migrate south pretty much mirroring the waterfowl migration, ducks making up a great portion of their diet at this season. Their winter range included most of the continental US, both along the coasts and in the interior wherever there were rivers and large bodies of open water where they could find concentrations of fish, waterfowl and carrion. Here they would augment local populations and remain throughout the winter, sometimes gathering in large concentrations particularly at some preferred sites. During the first mild days of early spring northern birds would begin the northward migration back to their breeding territories, usually peaking in March, and again coinciding with the northward waterfowl migration. Resident birds, those that nested in the southern portions of their range, would begin nesting as early as late February and the nesting season would be well under way by early April.

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 that were 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. Even though the Bald Eagle was officially protected by the US and Canada with the passage of the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty, illegal shooting continued.

But 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 which caused them to lay 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 4 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in Ohio. Unfortunately these nests, all of which were along Lake Erie, were not producing young. But it was about this time that the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), aided by numerous state Departments of Natural Resources, began making concentrated efforts to protect and manage remaining populations. Between these efforts and the ban of DDT, Bald Eagle populations began to slowly rebound. In 1963 there were only 413 pairs of nesting Bald Eagles in the lower

48 states according to the USFWS. Today that number has grown to over 10,000 nesting Bald Eagles south of Canada.

Over the past decade Bald Eagle nesting populations have also greatly increased in our general region of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky and have mirrored the national numbers. Bald Eagle nests have increased in each of the past 21 years in Ohio. By 1995 there were still only 29 Bald Eagle nests in Ohio but that number increased to 108 nests in 2004 and to 184 nests in 2008. Indiana has a similar story. The first Bald Eagle nest in Indiana since 1887 was reported in 1991. By 1997 Indiana had 15 active nests and that number has steadily increased to this year's record number of 90 Bald Eagle nests. Kentucky's first modern nest record came in 1986 and by 1996 there were still only 12 nests. In 2008 that number has grown to a bit over 50 active Bald Eagle nests in that state.

It takes four to five years for a Bald Eagle to reach sexual maturity. Most of these young birds wander considerably before becoming breeding adults. Over the past five years there have been a significant number of young birds produced throughout this region of the Midwest, and it's these wandering youngsters that have probably contributed to so many of our increased sightings, particularly during the summer months.

Most of these regional nests are located in northern Ohio along Lake Erie and in central and western Indiana. Most of the Kentucky nests come from the western portion of that state near the Mississippi and lower Ohio Rivers. But eagles are becoming widespread and are expanding their breeding ranges throughout these states, especially around large bodies of water. There are at least four active Bald Eagle nests within 40 miles of Greater Cincinnati. In Indiana there have been successful Bald Eagle nests the past few years at Versailles State Park in Ripley County and at Brookville Reservoir in Union County. In Ohio, Bald Eagles have nested the past few years at Rocky Fork Lake in Highland County and along the Ohio River near Higginsport in Brown County.

With the regular sightings of both adult and immature Bald Eagles in the Oxbow area throughout the warm months it makes one speculate that there might be an unknown nest site somewhere in the area. But none has been found to date, or if there has been, it's been a well guarded secret. But eagle nests are huge and usually fairly visible and have been likened to the size of an old Volkswagen Beetle turned upside down in the crotch of a tree. But considering the expanding populations and ranges of these birds it seems only a matter of time before the Oxbow has its own nesting pair.

The northern populations of this species have always visited the Oxbow during migration and winter. When you consider the population increases throughout North America and the nesting successes right here in the Midwest, we can expect to see Bald Eagle numbers continue to increase and become even a more common resident and visitor to the Oxbow in future years.

Oxbow, Inc.

A nonprofit organization formed by conservation groups and concerned citizens of Ohio and Indiana for the purpose of preserving and protecting a wetlands ecosystem know locally as the Oxbow, Hardintown, or Horseshoe Bottoms, from industrial development and to preserve the floodplain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers for use as a staging area for the seasonal migrations of waterfowl. This agricultural area is rich in geological, archaeological, and anthropological history.

Help us save this unique wetland ecosystem. Make your state a richer place in which to live by helping us preserve this precious resource. **Membership in Oxbow, Inc. is encouraged and solicited.**

Prothonotary Warbler	\$ 15	Wood Duck	\$ 25
Great Blue Heron	\$ 50	Green-winged Teal	\$100
Great Egret	\$250	Osprey	\$500
Bald Eagle	\$1000		
Charm of Goldfinches (Group Level) \$25			

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