



January—February 2010

No. 141

WETLAND *matters*

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

Have you visited our website?... www.oxbowinc.info

Need a speaker? Call 513-851-9835

What's Taking Flight

.....by Jon Seymour

Another year, another summary! It sounds tedious, but it is a joy!

2009 was our 24th year of existence and we spent some energy getting ready to celebrate our 25th Anniversary in 2010. In conjunction with the Ohio Valley Camera Club we launched a year long photography contest celebrating the wildlife of the lower Great Miami River and Lower Whitewater River watersheds. Cash prizes in several categories, generously funded by Kelly Ricetti and Seapine Software, have been offered. We expect participation to be large. The resulting photos will be the property of Oxbow, Inc. and will be displayed at venues in the area including the Oxbow office. This is a great way to start our anniversary celebration, since the wildlife we have worked so hard to preserve in the area will be showcased for all to see and cherish.

The year started with major Bald Eagle sightings throughout the Oxbow area as well as to the north or the Oxbow along both the Great Miami and Whitewater Rivers. A record sighting of 10 Bald Eagles at one time was recorded in the early spring. This sighting was followed shortly by the announcement of 2 Bald Eagle nests being found along the Great Miami in Butler County and one Bald Eagle nest found along the Whitewater just south of Harrison. This nest is the first ever recorded in the written history of Hamilton County. The nest near Harrison was successful and fledged one chick to add to the growing population of Bald Eagles in southern Ohio and Indiana. Although more common now, there are still many people looking for their first sighting of a local Bald Eagle. We hope that a few trips to the Oxbow area will satisfy that longing. With the population climbing we hope to discover more nests along the river system in 2010.

Our experiment with gravel on the main access road along Oxbow Lake to the Oxbow Lake overlook was more than successful. The most common comment I heard all year was how much the gravel road was appreciated. As a result of the gravel, the Oxbow Lake Over-

look was accessible most of the year, nearly independent of the weather conditions. As a result users of the Oxbow did very little off road damage along the graveled areas. This summer we continued the gravel operation and finished graveled the road down along Oxbow Lake and then out along the Lawrenceburg Conservancy District (LCD) property all the way to the railroad tracks. There it joined the graveled road along the tracks and exited behind the Hollywood Casino. Gravel in the floodplain silt sinks in and we will have to continue to put a skim coat on from time to time and place to place,

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Oxbow is on the Move

During the next 6 months Oxbow, Inc. will be gradually changing its address from:

P.O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, OH 45243
to

P.O. Box 4172, Lawrenceburg, IN 47025

The new address already appears on our website and in the Wetland Matters. It will soon appear on our new brochure and on all our official stationary. The 45243 address will still work for a few months but after that it will cease to exist. This is another phase of moving our actual operations next door to the Oxbow area.

January Annual Members Meeting A Great Kick-off to Our 25th Anniversary Year

Don't miss Tom Strohfeldt our speaker for our January 12, 2010 Annual Members Meeting. We have the business of electing directors and officers and the treat of hearing Tom take us back to the shores of the Great Miami and to Fort Finney and the Indian gathering of 1785-86. The treaty signed at the fort in 1786 would be the key that opened the door for the establishment of the Northwest Territories by Congress in 1787. Come, participate in the election, and enjoy our history.

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but the base coat is really helping keep cars and trucks on the road and out of the fields.

Our farming operations were again successful and the wildlife crop left in the fields as a result of our contracts with the farmers will serve as a source of food for flocks of migrating ducks and geese. The periodic winter flooding we expect this season draws hundreds of ducks and geese and based on last years observations, the receding flood waters attract the Bald Eagles to the fish trapped in shallow waters.

Friends of the Great Miami has adopted a portion of the river bank along the Great Miami just north of the railroad crossing as a bank restoration area. They have planted hundreds of trees in the 1/3 mile strip of shore line. We are grateful for their support and as in the past remain willing to provide Silver Maple seedlings and Willow shafts to help with bank restoration elsewhere in the Great Miami system..

The drought of 2007 (Oxbow Lake dried up) and the near drought of 2008 reduced the fish population in Oxbow Lake and may have wiped out the adult mussels that were common in the lake. While the fish population is slowly building back up the mussel population may take several years to reestablish it's self. The result of the fish reduction and the fact that the lake never really went down in 2009, led to an observe reduction in the numbers of heron that the area supported in 2009. The numbers were about half of those seen in previous years. As normal cycling returns the heron population should continue to build up to historic levels.

We had two special news stories in 2009. The first was the addition of not one but two species of birds to our species list. On August 29th during a scheduled Oxbow bird walk led by Ned Keller, participant Allan Bruner noticed an odd looking bird on the electric wire running parallel to the railroad tracks. It turned out to be a Western Kingbird – our 284th species. On October 10th Steve Pelikan was early for a scheduled tour he was to lead that morning. To pass the time Steve went birding and found a LeConte's Sparrow – our 285th species of bird. It still amazes me that this little 5 square mile pocket at the intersection of Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky can have a bird list that long. I have often discussed with Jay Stenger that the real list may be much longer. The problem is that at any one time in the Oxbow there are only a few observers. Much of the Oxbow, on most of the days of the year, has no observers.

The second great news story is the best in my opinion. We were able to add 36 more acres of land to the area protected by Oxbow ownership. This new purchase has several new significances for Oxbow, Inc. First it gives us our second foothold on the east bank of the Great Miami River, second it gave us the mouth of Double Lick Creek, third it gives us control of an eroding

bend in the river where we can do additional stabilization work, and finally it gives us ownership of our first land north of I-275 Enterprises RV Park and adjacent to our conservation easements. We are thrilled to be able to add more land to Oxbow's holdings which increases the protection of the floodplain.



Waterfowl Symposium February 26-28th, 2010

The Ohio Ornithological Society & Columbus
Audubon at The Grange Insurance Audubon Center

The Ohio Ornithological Society, partnering with Columbus Audubon, will present a Waterfowl Symposium, the weekend of February 26-28, 2010 at GIAC along the Whittier Peninsula in downtown Columbus. Through lectures and speakers, we'll travel to the marshes of Iraq, visit the breeding grounds of the Arctic, fly above the stopover habitat of Lake Erie, and look inside nests to learn about the secret life of waterfowl. **Just \$80 for the entire weekend (Friday-Sunday) if you are a member of OOS or CA/GIAC.**

Friday evening features a special performance by *The Swinging Orangutangs* featuring Julie Zickefoose and Bill Thompson III. The event is a special fundraiser for *Nature Iraq*. Bring your dancing shoes, leave your hiking boots in the vehicle, and find out! There will be beer, wine, and appetizers including a taste of the Middle East. Also, take a behind the scenes tour of the green-design, LEED-certified GIAC building while admiring the lights of downtown Columbus in the distance. **Bring a friend or guest Friday night for just a \$10 donation.**

Saturday's line-up includes a day of great speakers. Dr. Azzam Alwash, the Chief Executive Officer of *Nature Iraq*, will be keynote speaker Saturday evening. Additionally, two speakers from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will join us. Jessie Barry, the Assistant Curator of the Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds and Chris Wood, will talk about the roles birdwatchers can play in tracking duck populations to ultimately better conserve species. Legendary birder, author, and duck stamp supporter Paul Baicich, will share the inside scoop on 75 years of Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamps, better known as Duck Stamps. Other speakers include Dr. Gwen Myers, Associate Veterinarian from The Columbus Zoo & Aquarium and Keith Lott, Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Sunday morning, travel independently to Central Ohio's reservoirs, rivers, and ponds including Hoover Reservoir, Deer Creek Wildlife Area, Pickerington Ponds, Slate Run Metropark, the immediate vicinity of GIAC (the Grange-Scioto River area and Green Lawn Cemetery), and more!

Details and registration on the OOS website (<http://www.ohiobirds.org/index.php>) and on Columbus Audubon's website (<http://www.columbusaudubon.org/>). **You have two options for registration:** 1.) online through the Columbus Audubon website or, 2.) mail-in registration by check sent to OOS (PO Box 14051, Columbus, Ohio 43214).

Election Time Again

Our January Members Meeting will be held Tuesday, January 12, 2010 at the 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 election to a three year term on the Board ending in February 2013:

- Aaron Perlman
- Jim Poehlmann
- Jon Seymour
- Mike Miller
- Wayne Wauligman

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



Early Settler in This Region

At our October member's program, Jim Williams gave an account of his ancestor Philip Gatch who came to live in what is now the Milford area in the late 1700s. Philip Gatch was a second generation American of German descent who became a Methodist itinerant preacher against his family's advice. In time he married a woman whose dowry included slaves. Being against slavery and also being persecuted because Methodists were considered Tories in pre-Revolution America, he decided to move to the Northwest Territories where slavery was not allowed, the land fertile, and game abundant. He freed his slaves and his family traveled with the family of his wife's brother and made their way by wagon through what is now West Virginia to the Ohio River. There the party split with the women, children and some of the men continuing via flatboat and the men on horseback. They traveled through a forested wilderness filled with bear, panthers (mountain lions), deer, and wolves and even reported seeing a white pelican hanging in a cabin. Philip Gatch was a surveyor and played a role in establishing Ohio statehood.



Weed Police Report

.....by Kani Meyer

On October 17th, five energetic and hard-working Oxbow volunteers joined me in clearing out bush honeysuckle from the area behind our parking lot. Velda Miller and I lopped, Mike and Joe Kluesener took a chain saw to the very large stems, Brent Grubbs used a pick mattock to dig out bushes and Bob Schlegel established a piling area and helped fill it. I treated stumps with RoundUp and also sprayed garlic mustard, one of the few plants that can grow under bush honeysuckle. I was delighted in the dent we made in the honeysuckle. Our next clean up will be tackling garlic mustard next April so please consult our web page at www.oxbow.org closer to that month to see when we'll be working again!

Conservation Corner

by Jon Seymour

"In a surprising number of men there burns a curiosity about machines and a loving care in their construction, maintenance, and use. This bent for mechanisms, even though clothed in greasy overalls, is often the pure fire of intellect. It is the earmark of our time.

Everyone knows this, but what few realize is that an equal bent for the mechanisms of nature is a possible earmark of some future generation." Aldo Leopold, The Farmer as a Conservationist (1939)

The Oxbow area's representative to the Indiana House, Bob Bischoff, has recently been named the recipient of the Life Time Achievement Award by INCA, the statewide organization of conservation groups that is concerned with conservation legislation in Indiana. Bob has shown throughout his career as a legislator a strong regard for the natural heritage of Indiana and the strong relationship between the people of Indiana and the land. We are very pleased to have been part of the INCA group that recommended Bob's name. Along with John Miller, past President of Oxbow, Inc., we were early supporters for nominating Bob for this honor. Bob will receive his award at the INCA sponsored Statehouse Day on January 26, 2010. If you are interested in attending the ceremony to honor Bob, give me a call at 513-851-9835.

Oxbow continues to be involved by making our voice known on the protection of the lower Whitewater and lower Great Miami watersheds. We sit at the bottom of both rivers and what is put in the river, comes down the river, and can land in the Oxbow. We have adopted the policy that we will comment on all threats to the river that show a potential for negative impact. We will face the argument that each of these threats is too small to worry about. In general that is true but the problem is all these small changes add up to one large change. The only way to combat the large change is to combat all the small changes before they can add up to a big problem. We sit at the bottom of two fairly large watersheds and we need to be concerned with the health of these watersheds. If we do not concern ourselves we may find that we have lost all or part of what we are trying to protect.

Old is Old But It Is a Lot of Fun!

...by Jon Seymour

I am not talking about my age but about some books that were recently donated to Oxbow, Inc. by Michael Hoff of the Whitewater Valley Land Trust. Michael had bought a crate of books at an estate sale and after looking them over thought that Oxbow, Inc. would be interested in providing some of them a home. He was right, we are.

The first book is Zadok Cramer's "The Navigator", 7th Edition, 1811. Now before anyone gets excited this is a copy of the original text published in 1979 but the contents are pure 1811. The second book is by Samuel Cummings entitled "The Western Pilot", 1847. Again the text is 1847 but this copy was published in 1978. The last book is the "Coast Guard Light List, Volume V, Mississippi River System, published 1986 and this guide book is original.

The Navigator, 1811 describes the Oxbow area as follows: (the navigator is heading down river)

North Bend,

In low water here is a great sand bar, channel right shore – From the North Bend to the Great Miami, the channel is in the middle of the river, there being large sand bars on both shores.

Great Miami (or Mineami) River right side,

At the mouth of this river there is a sand bar, channel on the left shore; and about 300 yards below is another sand bar on the same side, channel midway between the bar and the right shore.

The great Miami is a Rocky river, has a very stony channel, a swift stream, but no falls: is 200 yards wide at its mouth; at the Pickaway towns 75 miles up, it is contracted to the breadth of 30 yards: it is nevertheless, navigable for loaded canoes 50 miles above the towns....

Lawrenceburgh, right bank,

This town stands in a low rich bottom: it is the seat of justice for Dearborn county, Indian Territory.

We will reproduce the entry from The Western Pilot in a later issue of Wetland Matters.

Wish List for volunteers:

- A volunteer interested in organization to help us organize files in the office.
- A volunteer interested in history to organize historical documents and create a living history of Oxbow, Inc.
- A volunteer interested in interviewing other volunteers and writing up short stories, on the efforts of each volunteer, to be published in our newsletter.

If you are interested or think you might be interested call Jon Seymour at 513-851-9835 to talk about it. Oxbow, Inc. runs solely on the basis of volunteer effort and all that we accomplish is due to our volunteers.

Oxbow, Inc. would like to thank:

Mick Acus
for his donation of a "Gourd-gret"

Jean Kearns
for a generous donation

George & Jean Perbix
for their generous donation

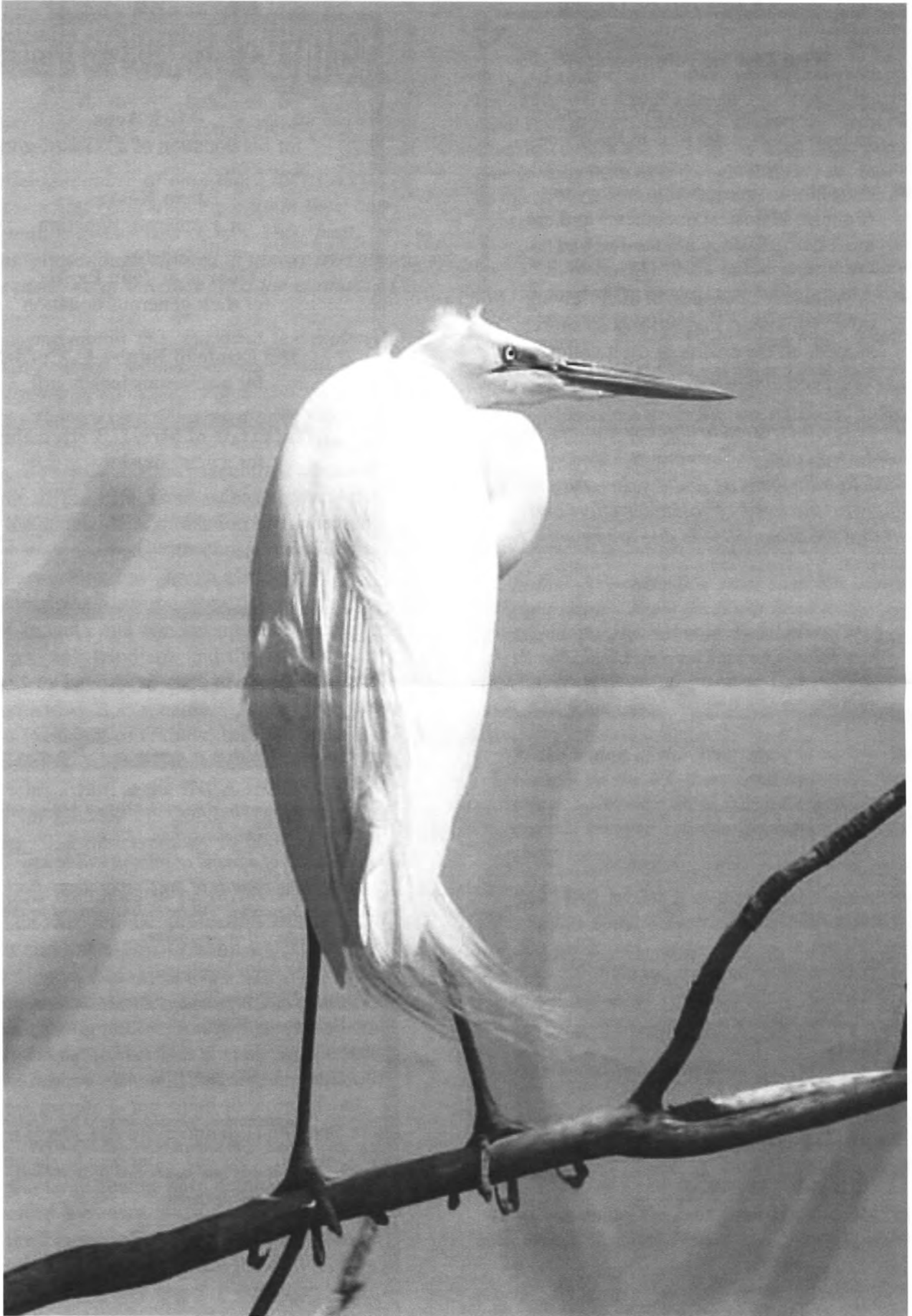
The Estate of Eunice C. Cordell
for a generous legacy gift

The Estate of Mrs. L. Patton Davis
for a generous legacy 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.



This beautiful Great Egret was found in the Oxbow by Ruhikant Meetej who was able to capture the elegance of one of the common birds of the Oxbow. *(Photo by Ruhikant Meetej)*



Some of the many volunteers gathered on November 21st to help with the prairie burn at Jackpot Pond. Unfortunately almost nothing caught fire and there was little for people to do. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



On December 5th, the second attempt to burn the prairie at Jackpot Pond was a little more successful with about 1/3 of the prairie burned. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



The last vestiges of the Jackpot Pond burn work their way down hill against the wind. Soon they will extinguish themselves or be extinguished by volunteers. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



A much smaller group of volunteers gathered for the second attempt to burn the Jackpot Pond prairie on December 5th with more success. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



The burned area of the Jackpot Pond prairie looking from where the fire stopped toward where the fire began. Only about 1/3 of the prairie caught fire during the burn attempt. Other methods will have to be employed to continue the control of succession in the area. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



Kani Meyer, head of the Oxbow Land Management Committee, watches the last vestiges of the Jackpot Pond fire slowly die out before working actively to extinguish the last few isolated fires. (Photo by Jon Seymour)



usings

by Dave Styer

Le Conte's Sparrow, another new bird for the Oxbow Area

On October 10, 2009 Steve Pelikan enjoyed a fine sparrow day at the Oxbow. The weedy fields of fall have always been good since prairie habitat was created. Steve no doubt saw lots of Song Sparrows. He also saw Lincoln's Sparrows. They are decidedly less common than Song Sparrows, but now quite regular in the area in the fall. Much more unusual still was the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow he saw. The first record of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in the Oxbow area was one seen by Duncan Evered and Lyla Messick on 11 October 1987. I'm not sure that any have been seen there in the intervening twenty-two years. Steve also got a great look at a Le Conte's Sparrow. In two ways that was the most unusual birding event of the day. For one thing, it was the first sighting of this sparrow in the Oxbow area. For another, Le Conte's Sparrows spend so much time creeping mouse-like under dead grass that they can be almost impossible to see even where they are known to be.

Le Conte's Sparrows breed in wet areas in the northern Great Plains, especially in Canada. They winter from southern Illinois south to the Gulf Coast from Texas to western Florida. Cincinnati would be east of their main migration route, but not by far. Steve and I both think that one or two of these sparrows likely pass through the Oxbow area in many years. However, the likelihood of seeing one must be very small. This is worse than a needle in a haystack. Perhaps you should imagine a needle that sneaks away from you as you get close. Try to find that!

In *The Birds of Kentucky* Mengel describes a flock of Le Conte's Sparrow found in April 1950. "The birds remained stubbornly in the field, creeping about like mice under the mats of grass, and were most difficult to flush." P.B. Peabody (1901) is quoted in Bent's *Life Histories*, referring to the sparrow as "This weird, mouse-like creature." Perhaps it would be more successful if mammalogists rather than ornithologists studied Le Conte's Sparrows. I don't mean the folks that study lions and tigers and bears; I mean the ones who study mice! Let's check on who has seen more Le Conte's Sparrows in the greater Cincinnati area than anyone else. It must be Woodrow Goodpaster and his friend Karl Maslowski. They collected six in one field in Clermont County in October 1936, and Goodpaster collected more in the same place the following spring. Those of you familiar with Cincinnati area history of the natural history sort

recall that Goodpaster published "A List of Birds and Mammals of Southwestern Ohio" in 1941. Goodpaster published several papers on mammals, and, in 1949 he and Maslowski published an article titled "Meadow Vole uses same nest for two litters" in the *Journal of Mammalogy*.

Now that I have made the case for mammalogists to study Le Conte's Sparrows, I hope you recognize the tongue-in-cheek nature of this proposal. In fact, according to Peterjohn, in *The Birds of Ohio*, "the 1936 fall migration featured an unbelievable invasion. For example in Lucas County 53 were counted in a single wet meadow on October 25 and several hundred were thought to be present." "That flight has never been repeated." Western Indiana is on or near the Le Conte's Sparrows regular migration route, and there they are much more frequently seen.

The taxonomy of the Le Conte's Sparrow has been as elusive as the bird itself. Ernest Choate, in *The Dictionary of American Bird Names* gives a two-page account of how John Latham named the sparrow *Fringilla caudacuta* in 1790 from a specimen taken in Georgia. It was pretty much lost track of. Fifty-three years later, when John Bell brought a specimen to Audubon while they were in North Dakota, Audubon thought it was a new species, and named it *Emberiza leconteii* after his friend Dr. John Le Conte. From that point on the sparrow was not lost to mind, and it is known in English as Le Conte's Sparrow. The scientific name has had a much rougher history. It couldn't keep the name *Fringilla*, because it is not really that closely related to *Fringilla* finches. After several changes of scientific name, it has ended up in the genus *Ammodramus*. But it can't be named *Ammodramus caudacutus* because the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow has that scientific name, and it was named before 1790, when Le Conte's Sparrow was first given a scientific name. Thus, after six or seven scientific name changes what could be a better scientific name for our mysterious sparrow than *Ammodramus leconteii*? Choate concludes his commentary on Le Conte's Sparrow with the following statements:

The common name, which is not subject to the decisions of learned taxonomists, remains as a memento of the bird who not only was lost, but when found had proven to be very elusive. A cynic is supposed to have said that taxonomy is a branch of science concerned mainly with recording errors.

At this point you've about heard it all. How about this? There is Le Conte's Thrasher, described in Kenn Kaufman's *Birds of North America* as "a pale wraith of barren deserts." Is this another sneaky bird named for Audubon's friend? No! It is named for Dr. John L. Le Conte, first cousin to Dr. John Le Conte. Now you have heard it all.

Horseshoe Bottoms Diary

Saturday, October 10, 2009 by Steve Pelikan

I got up earlier than I needed to October 10th. I had plans to meet the members of the Aurora Garden Club and their friends for a mid-morning visit to Oxbow's land. I could arrive, scout the area briefly, and meet the visitors after getting another 90 minutes' sleep. But October is my favorite month for birding in the Oxbow. True, there are usually more ducks with the high waters in spring and more shorebirds in August and September. But unsettled weather in October often delivers unusual birds to the area. Migrants can be blown off course and, especially if it rains, induced to land where they otherwise might not. We'd had passing showers and northerly breezes overnight so I left early for the Oxbow just as the rain was ending, the pavement was drying in Cincinnati, and the clouds parting to show enough blue sky that I stopped worrying what to do with the visitors if it poured again or the roads were too slick and muddy.

Getting out of the car by the cement plant I knew right away that there were lots of birds around. Migrants! Passerines! Palm and Myrtle Warblers, Waxwings, passing Blue Jays, and large flocks of Redwings were to be expected. But the Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo that I encountered in the trees along the Oxbow Lake convinced me that lots of birds had been moving overnight. All 3 of these were rather late records for the season. I sometimes encounter Tanagers in those trees in the summer but the Cuckoo and the Oriole were unusual.

"Probably recently arrived migrants that landed in the rain and haven't had a chance yet to move to more comfortable and usual environs," I thought.

To plan the morning's activities, I drove most of the way to Osprey Lake and parked with the intention walking to the overlook parking area, seeing how muddy the road was, determining whether it would be worth carrying a 'scope for people to use looking at herons, and seeing what flowers were still in bloom (they were a garden club, after all).

Not ten steps from the car, a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow popped into the top of a clump of Indian Grass and before it disappeared I'd also seen Song, Savannah, Swamp, and White-throated Sparrows. They made me change plans and walk out into the "prairie restoration" which is now doing very nicely with hardly any of the serious weeds (Johnson Grass, Canada Thistle) remaining. It looked like ideal habitat for migrant sparrows.

I got a bit wet as the lower lying plants had yet to dry. About halfway to the levee around the north end of Osprey Lake I caught sight of another orange faced sparrow. Seconds later, I got a nearly perfect view of the field

marks I'd often hoped for but never seen before: light stripe on the middle of the crown and purple streaking on the grayish nape. This was a LeConte's Sparrow, no question about it. No question especially since I'd just been looking at the only other bird that it might conceivably be confused with --- the sharp tail.

It was quite exciting to see a bird I'd never seen before --- something that hardly ever happens to someone my age who has birded regularly in the same region for so long. But I was more excited about finding a new bird for the Oxbow list. I knew it wasn't mentioned in David Styer's *Birds of the Oxbow*. More than a personal "lifer," this bird was a contribution to the decades long project of birding the Oxbow that has involved many of the best birders I've known. I thought of how pleased David would be to hear about the sparrow and how delighted Morris Mercer would have been.

South of Osprey Lake there were more Swamp Sparrows and I managed to find at least 2 Lincoln's Sparrows though I suspect that there were many more than that present.

I sat on a bench at the overlook thinking that I really shouldn't lead the field trip out into the "weed" fields and we'd have to content ourselves with seeing the usual suspects (herons, egrets, cormorants, and kingfishers) if we looked much at birds. It took a full 5 minutes for me to pull off all the seeds I'd accumulated on my shoes, socks, pants, and sweatshirt. Bur-cucumber, beggarticks, ticktrefoil, and lots more beggarticks were the plants I'd been wading through.

I thought, "These seeds are essentially all from native plants and that's good evidence that the habitat restoration is progressing extremely well. I must remember to tell Kani Meyer."

I made it back to my car and then the parking area by the cement plant in time to meet the field trip participants. They were a fun and enthusiastic group who enjoyed being outdoors and seems to genuinely appreciate the Oxbow. Rather than driving, we all walked to the overlook and back. Many on the walk showed keen eyes for the decorative possibilities in the various drying flower heads and seed pods we found and I hope the few specimens they took home served them well.

That's the story: the air was cool and the sun warm as happens best on fall days. My companions for the field trip were amiable. So, even putting aside my earlier good luck birding, it was a great day to be out in the Oxbow. But then, most any day is, as far as I can tell.

Saturday, December 5, 2009 by Jon Seymour

Kani Meyer is in the field. Rick Pope has pulled up his tractor with plow blade attached. John Miller, Past President of Oxbow, Inc., and Tom Borgman, Hamilton County Park District, are discussing the fire plan with

(continued on page 10)

Continued from page 9—Horseshoe Bottom Diary

Kani. Several other folks are standing ready with shovels. I am the last to arrive but we all have the same question. Will the prairie burn today? It is a question that we will soon have the answer to. Two weeks ago the answer to the question was "NO". Two weeks ago a large number of volunteers had turned out to burn the prairies at Jackpot Pond and Osprey Lake. Unfortunately the prairie did not want to burn. The bottom six inches of the grass line had been thoroughly wet with a mid week rain and while the tops of the grass caught fire the fire could not sustain itself and move along the ground.

Conditions look a little better today, but not much. We had another mid-week rain which wet the grass down again but we had some good winds and some dry weather so there was a sliver of hope. Tom and John fan out to start backfires that we all hope will stop any fire that gets going. The backfires and the road will be today's fire breaks. The wind is coming out of the WNW so John and Tom will start the main burn on the north and west side of the prairie near Jackpot Pond. John and Tom are dripping burning kerosene from specially designed fire starters. They have been out of sight in the tall grass for a long time and nothing seems to be happening. Only occasionally can we see their heads on the back side of the prairie. The rest of the team waits expectantly and hopefully along the road.

We hear it before we can see it. Like a large bowl of Rice Krispies, the snapping and cracking announce a plume of smoke rising into the sky from the furthest corner of the prairie. The flame comes into view above the grasses. We have ignition. It is a welcome sight but things don't look quite right. The flames rise and fall in intensity as the move across the grasses. This is not a strong burn. It is not spreading out but burning towards our position on the road in a very narrow band. It is much better than last week but it will not burn the entire prairie. As the fire approaches it stays in the narrow band and seems to come in fits and starts – sometimes flaming up and sometimes disappearing to black smoke. It does not look like it is even going to reach the road. About 100 feet from the road the fire stalls and peters out. Further attempts to light the remaining portion of the prairie fail miserably and a decision is made to move the main part of the crew to Osprey Lake and see if we have better luck there. None of us is too hopeful.

Kani, I, and Ed Gemperle stay behind to put out the fire at Jackpot Pond. Kani and I strike out for the smoke still lifting skyward from the area near where the fire started while Ed heads for the small fires still burning in the area where the main blaze died out. The burned area is okay. In some areas the burn is to the ground. In

other areas the bottom 2-4 inches is untouched as the fire just burned over the top of the area and not all the way to the ground. For best prairie management we want to have a burn to the top of the soil. Kani is leading the way through the fire area where we are walking on ashes of the plants that a few minutes ago were on fire. The fire was brief, the ground had been cold before the fire, the air is cold, and now the ashes are already cold. The ash is everywhere. (Later when I got home I discovered that the fine charcoal dust of the burn had penetrated my pants and my legs had turned a deathly light charcoal gray color.)

Kani has found the small fires that are still burning on the edge of where the fire started. Amazingly they are burning downhill against the wind. Kani forgot to bring her shovel so she starts stomping out the small blazes with her boots. I have my shovel and choose to use it as that was the purpose of having a shovel in the first place. My shovel is rounded and filed to a near knife edge. I can cut small saplings with it if I need to. To put out a fire with a round shovel you need to roll the blade over the fire and hold it in position long enough to smother the fire. You can also use it to dig dirt that can be thrown on top of the fire to smother the burning. Between Kani's stomping and my shovel work we put out the many small fires burning on the edge and head back towards Ed's position. Ed has his end of the fire under control. A look back along the blackened path of the fire reveals 4-6 acres of prairie burned – the rest standing happily untouched. We watch the area for a few minutes and do not see any wisps of smoke rising from the burn area. Kani declares victory and we move to catch up to the others at Osprey Lake. We do not see any smoke coming from the Lake area and we are concerned that they are not having any success.

We arrive at Osprey Lake area to see that John and Tom are just starting to set back fires in the prairie. They have been working to build a secondary back fire and that is now done. They walk through the promising grass and drop their flaming kerosene. In most places nothing much happens. In a few other places the area flares up only to burn itself out in a few minutes. The flameout is so complete that there are no minor fires burning around the edges as we had at Jackpot Pond.

Time to regroup and find Plan B! A discussion follows with spring burns and bush hogging being the principle options. We joke that all we really need to do is ask Rick Pope to throw his cigar ash into the prairie and it would probably go up in instant flames. Kani agrees that our next steps will be the major subject of the Land Committee meeting she chairs that will be held in January to plan the 2010 land management strategy. It is also time to go home and see if I can wash this black ash charcoal out of my clothing and hair.

Oxbow Inc. PROGRAMS

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 at the corner of Walnut and Center Streets. Free parking is available on Walnut St., Center St., and in the parking lot behind the building.)

Tuesday, January 12, 2010, 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 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 Strofeldt, 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.

Tuesday, February 9, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
301 Walnut St., Lawrenceburg
The Oxbow, Inc. Office

Loyola Walter and Meg Riestenberg teach two courses at the College of Mount St. Joseph that combine science with art - ART 334 The Art of the Nature Journal, and IDS 305 The Artist as Naturalist: The Naturalist as Artist. The courses are designed to serve people who love to be in nature and wish to see it and understand it more fully through the kind of observant looking and seeing inherent in the study of science and in the practice of drawing. Students have the opportunity to assemble and sew their own hard-bound journals, and to use them as they "journal" and draw during their time spent in the natural world. The courses include many field trips, including, but not limited to, excursions to the Lloyd Library, Historical Society's library in the Museum Center, to several Hamilton County Parks, to Boone Cliffs in Burlington KY, to the Edge of Appalachia in Adams County and of course, to Oxbow. Loyola and Meg will bring a sampling of students' art as well as slides to show Oxbow members what our talented students have created during their time outside in the "real world."

Oxbow Inc. FIELD TRIPS

Friday, January 29, 2010—7:00 P.M.
Meet at the Shawnee Lookout
Golf Course Parking Lot
Leader: John Klein, (513) 728-3551 ext 227,
jklein@greatparks.org

John Klein, of the Hamilton County Parks, will once again lead this unique annual January field trip, which honors the memory of one of Oxbow Inc's founders, the beloved and venerable Morris Mercer. John likes to call this outing the MMM (Morris Mercer Memorial) field trip.

Morris always loved the night woods, especially during the winter with snow on the ground. Many years ago he began leading this January evening trip in the Shawnee Lookout woodlands that overlook the Oxbow. John and Morris were good friends and John joined Morris for many of those walks and is keeping the tradition alive today.

We will meet in the parking lot of the Shawnee Lookout Golf Course at 7:00 P.M., and from there John will lead us on a leisurely two hour walk around the park. It will be close to a full moon on this date and visibility should be good. John will try to hoot up some owls, we'll look at the constellations and see what other denizens of the night woods are out and about. John has begun his own tradition on this walk and will pass out M & M's. It's a fun and out of the ordinary trip and you should try to make it. And as Morris would always say, "Let's hope there's some snow on the ground".

The park is normally closed at this time of night but the rangers will have the gates open for us. Dress warmly.

Saturday, February 20, 2010—9:00 A.M.
At the Oxbow Office
301 Walnut Street, Lawrenceburg
Leader: Jon Seymour, (513) 851-9835,
jlsjks@hotmail.com

Jon Seymour will lead us on this morning visit to the Oxbow. Jon knows the Oxbow in and out, and he will be in tune with all the natural wonders to be found there. But Jon will also be looking for ducks, as early spring waterfowl migration should be getting under way and the Oxbow is one of the best places to watch it happen.

Obviously, as President of Oxbow Inc., Jon has the inside track on everything about the Oxbow and our organization. Aside from the birds and other wildlife we expect to see, this trip should be very interesting just to get Jon's unique perspective of the Oxbow, it's past, present and future.

The Oxbow is almost guaranteed to be muddy (if not totally under water) this time of the year. So be prepared and dress for a cold, wet day. **We will meet at the Office and carpool into the Oxbow.** There will be more hiking than driving but the Oxbow is flat so we should not stress anyone to much.

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 known 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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Wetland Matters, the newsletter for members of Oxbow, Inc., is published bimonthly.

