Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

Annual Report to Members
For the Year 2019
Overview
The information in this report is based mainly on accomplishments, events, and activities during calendar year 2019. Exceptions to that timeframe, e.g., the listing of trustees and officers for the period June, 2019 – May, 2020, are noted. The individuals listed as chairs and members of the committees are also individuals who served from June, 2019 through May, 2020.
Reports from the following committees are contained in the pages that follow:

- Communications Committee
- Education Committee
- Field Trips Committee
- Finance Committee
- Important Birding Area (IBA) Committee
- Sanctuary Committee

Interested in helping?
Reading through the attached reports will give you a sense of the many activities involved with meeting the mission of our organization (see boxed text to the right for our mission statement). We could use your help.

If you are interested in learning more about how to become involved with The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland please contact Jim Tomko, Board President, at 216/556-5441

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland (ASGC) promotes the conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities. ASGC, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, has over 1,400 member households throughout the Greater Cleveland area, owns over 500 acres of protected land, and is one of northeast Ohio’s oldest continuously operating environmental organizations.
From the President

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland is alive and well! I am continuously astounded by the innovations, ideas, and talent that we have received from our board of trustees. In this challenging time of a global pandemic, members have come up with unique and interesting ways to engage and inspire our membership concerning our chapter and our mission. Our new education chairman Matt Valencic, is using “Zoom” presentations to educate and entertain nature lovers. He has taken this opportunity to teach himself and others that we can still get our message out there from the comfort and safety of our own homes.

A big thank you goes to our secretary Carol Lillich who is essential at keeping us on task and on time. Her minutes accurately reflect our meeting’s deliberations. Her timeliness with needed thank you letters and her attention to protocol and etiquette help to keep us in good favor with our members and donors.

I am forever in debt to Alison DeBroux who years ago stepped up to our vacant Education Committee Chairmanship. She has developed this committee into its current stellar status. Her programs have taken this committee’s projects to be the public face of ASGC. This year she has stepped down to allow Matt Valencic to take it from here. Matt has graciously accepted this position and will instill his energy and inspiration to the committee reaching new heights.

Alison has agreed to remain our “House Wren” editor and will continue publishing this wonderful newsletter. I often get comments from her readership about how they look forward to each edition. Her organization, ideas and editing make this communication tool the high caliber that it is.

Jim DeBroux has volunteered to chair a new committee called “Documentum Committee” designed to review and organize our archives of documents and records. He is recruiting members to help him accomplish this Herculean task. It will be wonderful to know what we have and how to easily access our history.

Stephanie Demyan is taking over the position of treasurer with advice from our past treasurer John Weber. My thanks to John for being there at our low point and restoring us to the clear and concise reporting and managing style we have today. I am pleased to have Stephanie fill this position and am grateful to both John and Stephanie for their energy and diligent work.

Board members Mary Salamon and Penny Orr continue to make the grounds around the education center picturesque with native plantings. Their heart and soul are in this project and their work make this place welcoming and beautiful.

John Lillich thankfully considers Hach-Otis to be his own backyard (which it kind of is!) He has hiked that forest since childhood. He takes Hach-Otis under his wing and treats it with loving care. The process of placing most of the new section of Hack-Otis under State Nature Preserve status has begun. That will forever protect this beautiful “emerald gem”.

Ken Kresina, as always, continues to improve the sanctuaries with an eye toward the needs of wildlife. Ken always considers the native flora and fauna first and human needs a far second. It is the right attitude for wildlife sanctuaries. He is assisted by Rob Swaney with the more heavy-duty work of trail maintenance and erosion control.

Caretaker Mark Magree keeps the Novak Education center spotless and ready for any event we offer there. He keeps the outside neat and trim. He is our resident handyman to do our minor repairs and carpentry. He also keeps close watch of the Novak property with hardly anything escaping his notice.

The IBA committee contributes in many ways by promoting and participating in bird surveys, educational activities, and bird festivals provided by our chapter or other Audubon chapters and nature organizations. Inspiring protection and preservation of the Chagrin River IBA is accomplished by these and other chapter activities.
Our chapter continues to be an active member of the newly renovated Council of Ohio Audubon Chapters. My great thanks to Mark Demyan who somehow found time in his busy schedule to be our representative to this important statewide organization. He and Matt Valencic have secured us a place to be heard and a way to share ideas and solutions with other Ohio Audubon chapters.

Much appreciation is to be extended to other professionals on our board of trustees and in our membership, who contribute with their expertise in various ways. I am excited to welcome several new members to our board: Matt Bartolotta, Nora Kelly, and Jim DeBroux. They will deepen our knowledge and broaden our understanding of what we need to accomplish. My gratitude to all others that are not named in person here. Without their assistance we would be in a struggle to persevere.

Our mission is to promote conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities. We have accomplished these goals with the time, talent, and financial support of some extremely generous people. I deeply appreciate all that they have contributed.

I am honored to serve with these skilled volunteers and I am very proud of the goals they have achieved in meeting our mission.

Jim Tomko, President
The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

Communications Committee
Alison DeBroux, Chair

Newsletter: The House Wren
Editor: Alison DeBroux
Contributing Writers: Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic
Guest Contributors: Carol Lillich, John Lillich, Mark Demyan, Marnie Urso, Kathy Cochran, Buster Banish, Barb Philbrick, Jim DeBroux, Betsy Siman, Dr. Dixie Benshoff

The House Wren is published nine times a year, September through May. It is printed in black-and-white by Minuteman Press, 17800 Chillicothe Road, Chagrin Falls, OH, and is mailed to all members unless requested otherwise. Printing and mailing costs are approximately $520 per issue. Members' addresses are downloaded from National Audubon's database, with approximately 150 chapter-only addresses added. A low-resolution color version is available on our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org.

The House Wren accepts submissions of articles and photos. All submissions must be the original work of the submitter, or contain the appropriate permissions for publishing. Email submissions to info@clevelandaudubon.org.

Website: www.clevelandaudubon.org
Webmaster: Sharon Swaney
ASGC Liaison: Alison DeBroux

Our website is a dynamic, continually changing source for all things ASGC. If you haven't visited lately, you can find us at www.clevelandaudubon.org. This spring we updated the revolving photos on the home page to reflect the arrival of spring. Photos were provided by Matt Valencic.

The site features easy-to-navigate pull-down menus to all of our various programs and information about who we are and what we are doing. On the left side is an interactive list of upcoming events that links to the complete calendar of goings-on. On the right side is a variety of buttons that link to information and registration forms for special events. Through the “Contact Us” page, you can request a Backyard Naturalist program, find local birding hotspots, and get answers to bird-related questions.

Email Marketing
Manager/Designer: Alison DeBroux

We use Constant Contact for our email marketing efforts. With this service, we are able to send mass emails with information about what's new with ASGC, including dates, times and details about our field trips and other events. A link to The House Wren is included with each monthly email. The cost for this service is based on the number of email contacts. We have more than 700 email contacts, and have seen a 14% increase in “open rate” over the 90 days ending April 13, 2020. Anyone interested in receiving these emails can contact us at info@clevelandaudubon.org or visit the contact us page at www.clevelandaudubon.org. There is always a safe unsubscribe link at the bottom of every email.

Facebook
Administrator: Mark Demyan
Contributor: Cathy Green

Cathy Green is a new volunteer (since the Volunteer Open House, 2020) and her expertise in using Facebook has been invaluable. We look forward to having our FB page be a dynamic addition to our marketing efforts.

Submitted by Alison DeBroux, Chair
The Education Committee
Matthew Valencic, Chair

Members: Kathy Cochran, Co-Chair, Julie Albrecht, Laura Bell-Peters, Kathryn Craig, Alison DeBroux, Joan Demirjian, David English, David Factor, Cathy Green, Joe Kollar, Sarah Mabey, Laurendra Messer, Barb Philbrick, Betsy Siman, Andrea Story.

The Education Committee is committed to the mission of promoting the conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through educational activities for adults and children in the Greater Cleveland community. The backgrounds of our members in science and education is varied and impressive, which contributes to the success of the programs and events offered. It is a privilege to work with such a talented group.

During the 2019-2020 season we offered the following programs and events:

**Chagrin River Bird Quest**

Volunteers: Kathryn Craig, Alison DeBroux, Joe Kollar, Laurendra Messer, Mary Salomon, Betsy Siman, Andrea & Jim Story, Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic, Mary Ann Wagner.

Our 5th annual Bird Quest was a great success, growing from just 9 teams in 2015 to 30 teams this year. The anniversary was acknowledged with new T-shirts, commemorative pens, an anniversary cake, and delicious food was provided by Mazzulo’s Market, Bainbridge, Ohio. Headquarters for the Quest Celebration was the West Woods Nature Center in Russell Township. More than 60 people attended the Celebration and many prizes were awarded to both children and adults for fun things and for serious birding accomplishments. The top team found 70 species of birds and the consolidated species count for all teams totaled 116! Two families have participated all 5 years and they were recognized by Jim Tomko and presented with a small gift. Our Co-sponsors contributed to the success of the event. Geauga Park District (Linda Gilbert, Naturalist & host) provided the venue for registration and the celebration. Blackbrook Audubon (Mary Ann Wagner and others) helped with the New Birders Workshop, publicity, and a donation of $200. Following the event, notes of appreciation were received from two families along with a $50 donation to ASGC.

Join us on September 11-12 for Chagrin River Bird Quest 2020. There will be some accommodations because of COVID19, but the event will take place. Check the ASGC website (www.clevelandaudubon.org) this summer for specifics as we get closer.

**Volunteer Open House**

Volunteers: Kathy Cochran, Kathryn Craig, Alison DeBroux, Joe Kollar, Sarah Mabey, Laurendra Messer, Betsy Siman, Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic

The third annual Volunteer Open House on January 19th brought 30 people to the Novak Education Center. Jim Tomko shared the many ways people could get involved both behind the scenes and in more visible roles. Board members and committee chairs were present to talk about their respective areas and answer questions from our guests. Two sign boards listed the many programs, events and activities that are available to volunteers. An abundance of snacks and beverages gave our guests reasons to ‘stick around and visit’. By the end of the day, 11 people signed up to volunteer and 4 committed to help with the upcoming Junior Birders Day (Joan Demirjian, David English, David Factor & Cathy Green). Expenses were modest at $100, thanks to many people contributing homemade goodies.
Junior Birders Day

Volunteers: Kathy, Katie and Sarah Cochran, Kathryn Craig, Alison DeBroux, Joan Demirjian, Dave English, David Factor, Cathy Green, Mara Hanson, Joe Kollar, Laurendra Messer, Nicole Ryman, Betsy Siman, Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic

This program is designed for children in K – 3rd grade, but the ‘story boards’ and materials contain content that can also be adapted for older students. In preparation for this year’s event, Lesson Plans for all 8 stations were updated with older students (and even adults) in mind. There were 28 students registered for the morning and afternoon sessions, up substantially from just 11 last year. Our volunteers did a fabulous job with these little children, many with very short attention spans. The students learned something about feathers and flight, feet and beaks, nests and habitat, songs, binoculars, and they even dissected an owl pellet! Everyone made a bird mask and took it home along with their personal Bird Guide Coloring Book and other goodies.

This is our most ‘volunteer intensive’ event so we were happy to learn that we could leave it up and use it again on March 7th for a group of 3rd & 4th graders preparing for Science Olympiad in Ornithology.

Science Olympiad Training in Ornithology

Volunteers: Kathy Cochran, Kathryn Craig, Dave English, David Factor, Cathy Green, Kelly Kozlowski, Sarah Mabey, Betsy Siman, Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic and Hiram College students Keegan Rankin and Carah Katzendorn.

ASGC received two separate requests to help students prepare for the Science Olympiad Ornithology section. We were excited to participate.

On March 5th David Factor, Kelly Kozlowski, Jim Tomko and Matt Valencic met for 2 hours with Solon High School students, answering their questions, suggesting things to consider and offering a list of resources. We shared our passion for birds and the environment, and even shared some “Audubon Moments” that happened in our birding experiences. We suggested they spend some time outdoors watching birds and not just studying academic information. We even offered to take them bird watching in September as they prepared for the 2020/2021 academic year. The students told their coach afterward that the session was very helpful.

On March 7th we hosted 8 students from Medina Schools at our Novak Education center for a modified ‘Junior Birder Day’. We only used 6 stations but spent more time at each. We covered feathers, flight, bones, feet, beaks, nests, habitat and energetics (birds energy demands). The most popular station was the owl pellet dissection where they discovered just what owls eat (mainly rodents). We then discussed how food is converted into energy for the bird to perform all its life functions. These 3rd and 4th graders were a delight! They asked many good questions and you could tell they wanted to be there. We hope to see them again in the fall of 2020.

Speakers Bureau – Backyard Naturalist

Volunteers: John Lillich, Sarah Mabey, Jim Tomko and Matt Valencic

The mission of ASGC is to promote the conservation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities. The Speakers Bureau brings the conservation message to hundreds of Greater Clevelanders each year by presenting up to 30 programs at schools, libraries, nature, garden and civic clubs and other Audubon chapters. The programs are listed on our website homepage under the Backyard Naturalist button.
From September 2019 through early March 2020 Jim Tomko and Matt Valencic presented 15 programs to a variety of groups. In early March COVID19 caused us to cancel 11 upcoming programs through May. It was disheartening until we discovered that we could still share some of our programs using ZOOM™, an internet-based platform for video and audio conferencing. On short notice we were able to offer 5 programs in April and May that reached 165 people. The programs were the popular Warbler Warm Up, a new program titled New Birders Workshop, Summer Birds of NE Ohio and two sessions of eBird: What’s in it for you? We are learning how to be more effective with Zoom programs and plan to have several offerings for our general membership beginning in September.

New Birders Workshop

Volunteers: Dave English, David Factor, Cathy Green, Kim Pease and Matt Valencic

This new 3-hour program is designed to help new birders be successful their first day birding. It starts with 1 hour of classroom work on birding basics, followed by a 2-hour walk in the Novak Sanctuary with an experienced birder. Each leader only has 3 - 4 students so personalized instruction can be given to everyone. Two sessions were planned for March and both filled to capacity (20 persons per session). COVID19 caused us to cancel the physical program but Zoom allowed us to deliver the classroom component to 30 people on April 15th. We will offer this program again next year so new birders will be ready to enjoy the Spring migration.

Submitted by Matthew Valencic, Chair

Field Trip Committee

Jim Tomko, Chair

Members: John Lillich, Carol Lillich

We attempted to hold at least one field trip in one of our 4 sanctuaries each month of the year. The field trips are inspired by seasonal changes in the flora, fauna, and weather. This year, formal field trips were halted in March due to Covid 19 (Corona Virus Pandemic). It was felt that to maintain social distancing and prevent the spread of this virus we would need to curtail our field trips. Up to that point we enjoyed summer, fall, and winter excursions including very popular ones such as John Lillich’s autumn leaf color walk at Hach-Otis, an Owl Prowl in Aurora, winter track walks, and a winter bird survey during the Great Backyard Bird Count. We hopefully will return to our regular monthly hikes in the future.

If anyone has an idea for a field trip or would like to lead one, the request will happily be considered.

Submitted by James W. Tomko, Chair
Finance Committee
John Weber, Chair

Members: Stephanie Demyan, Jim Tomko, Steve Zabor, Mark Demyan

2019 was a year of building for the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. The 2018 project of Hach Otis expansion was finished with the addition of a pole barn building and Kabota tractor so that the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland properties in the north east section may be maintained. Thanks to the generous donation from an anonymous donor combined with a positive gain on our investments, the expenses associated with the building and equipment did not affect the overall financial condition of the section.

As you can see in the Profit and Loss Budget vs Actual statement for the year 2019 that is attached. Our largest source of income is from our Annual Appeal. Other fund raising and contributions included membership dues and annual meeting income to help pay for the dinner. At the bottom of the Profit and Loss statement is the income from investments which exceeded our budget.

Education expenses for the year included a Bird Buddies, Bird Quest, and speaker fees. Sanctuary expenses were similar to previous years except for hiring a contractor of a heavy-duty machine which cost a little over $10,000 used to repair trails, repair to a bridge, and erosion control in the Novak Sanctuary. Our Newsletter costs for the year were on budget for the year.

Due to good investment returns and support of our donors we ended the year with $390,137 in KeyBank, Vanguard and Merrill Lynch, an increase of $26,159 compared to December 31, 2018. With the building of the pole barn together with the repair to the bridge and trails in Novak sanctuary, 2019 allowed us to build while continuing to provide outstanding services and education to our membership.

For further information on the financials, please contact the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland at:
216-556-5441.

Submitted by John Weber, Treasurer and
Stephanie Demyan, Assistant to Treasurer
Important Birding Area Committee
Jim Tomko, Acting Chair

Members: Sarah Mabey, Mary Salomon, Matthew Valencic

Almost all our activities support our effort to educate, protect and promote our assigned IBA (The Chagrin River IBA) which we share with Blackbrook Audubon Chapter. We conduct field trips, have speaking engagements, preserve property, and have birding events that inspire others to act in a way to conserve this wonderful river corridor. This year due to the global pandemic of Corona Virus, some of those activities have been curtailed and some have been held virtually “on line”. We will continue to innovate the study of and educate the public about this important system of natural resources.

Submitted by Jim Tomko, Acting Chair

Sanctuary Committee
Jim Tomko, Chair

Members: Bob Bartolotta, Matt Bartolotta, Mark Demyan, Ken Kresina, Carol Lillich, John Lillich, Mary Salomon, Rob Swaney, Steve Zabor

Our Sanctuaries have had a much higher uptick in traffic recently due to the governor’s “stay at home order” used to slow the spread of the Corona Virus Pandemic. Many people have taken to the woods with their new found time. It is great that people are enjoying the outdoors to fill their time but it is also concerning that too many hikers in our sanctuaries will cause too much disturbance. In fact, for a number of weeks Hach-Otis had to be closed due to people trying to social distance taking them way off the trail damaging the fragile forest understory.

Penny Orr and Mary Salamon continue planting and maintaining wonderful native plant beds around the Novak Education Center. We have constructed with donated funds a 2-bay storage garage at Hach-Otis to house our donated new Kubota tractor and tools to maintain the sanctuary. Some very generous people have provided the resources for this to happen. John and Carol Lillich have been keeping their namesake meadow in excellent condition for the avian fauna delighting in the Bluebirds and Barn Swallows that call that place home. The process of dedicating most of the new Hach-Otis property as a State Nature Preserve and thereby under State Nature Preserve protection has begun.

Ken Kresina began mowing and maintaining the fields and trails in the Aurora, Novak and Molnar sanctuaries as soon as the weather allowed. Full field mowing is stopped in mid-April to allow nesting birds and other creatures to carry on undisturbed. Strip mowing will continue throughout the summer in order to control Buckthorn invasion. The strips mowed last year will be allowed to grow to provide proper field habitat for native flora and fauna. The plan is to maintain the fields with a 4 to 5 year strip mowing pattern. The strips that were mowed in previous years show very good buckthorn control and good emergence of native herbaceous and woody plants.
Mark Magree has been essential in keeping the Education center and the grounds around the Ed center in excellent condition. He has converted rough trails into smooth easily walkable routes.

Invasive species are being attacked by mowing, pulling, trimming and judicial spot spraying with an herbicide that has wetland approval.

For the second time in recent years, very small patches of trillium are blooming and Ovenbirds can be heard calling in the forest.

Once again 2 eaglets are being raised and fledged by their parents in the Novak Sanctuary.

An Eagle Scout Project restored a large vernal pool in the Novak Sanctuary. Another Eagle Scout project is being planned to re-mark the Trail at the Molnar Sanctuary. Plans are underway to use revetments to control erosion around the foundation of the Case Bridge at the Aurora Sanctuary as we get advice and approval from ODNR DNAP. There are plans to control the widespread Japanese Barberry at Aurora under the supervision of Adam Wohlever the DNAP supervisor for our area.

All the sanctuaries are adding to the quality of life for both flora, fauna, and human-kind. We hope to maintain these wild areas for the wildlife both plant and animal as we also restore our own health by visiting these sanctuaries.

Submitted by Jim Tomko, Chair
2020-2021 Officers

President - Jim Tomko*: Chair, Sanctuary and Field Trips Committees, Member of IBA and Newsletter Committees; Spring Bird Walk Leader.

Vice President - Mark Demyan*: Member, Documentum, Finance and Newsletter Committees.

Secretary - Carol Lillich*: Member of the Documentum, Sanctuary, Field Trips, and Newsletter Committees; Schedule Gates Mills Spring Bird Walks.

Treasurer - Stephanie Demyan*: Chair, Finance Committee, Member Newsletter Committee.

*Member of Executive Committee
The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

2020-2021 Trustees

Bob Bartolotta: Member Sanctuary and Newsletter Committee

Matt Bartolotta: Member Sanctuary and Newsletter Committees

Kathy Cochran: Co-Chair Education Committee and member of the Newsletter Committee.

Alison DeBroux: Chair, Communications Committee and Member of Education Committee

Jim DeBroux: Chair, Documentum Committee; Member Newsletter Committee.

Claire Johnson: Member Newsletter Committee.

Nora Kelly: Member Newsletter Committee

John Lillich: Member Documentum, Sanctuary, Field Trips, and Newsletter Committees, Manager Hach-Otis Sanctuary and State Nature Preserve, and Gates Mills Spring Bird Walk Leader.
2020-2021 Trustees

Sarah Mabey: Member IBA, Education and Newsletter Committees.

Mary Salomon: Member Documentum, Important Birding Area, Sanctuary and Newsletter Committees.

Matt Valencic: Chair, Education Committee; Member Important Birding Area, and Newsletter Committees.

John Weber: Finance Committee and Newsletter Committees.

Harvey Webster: Chair, Programs Subcommittee, Member Education and Newsletter Committees.

Steve Zabor: Member Finance, Sanctuary and Newsletter Committees

Trustees are elected at ASGC’s annual meeting (usually held in June) by the general membership. Terms are typically 3 years and trustees are elected on a rotating basis.