

# WINGTIPS



OHIO'S FIRST-EVER AMERICAN FLAMINGOS, photo by Chad Wilson

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OCTOBER 2023

**Editors:**  
**Chad Wilson**  
**Marty Ackermann**  
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# October 2023 Program

Tuesday, October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7 p.m.

French Creek Nature Center

*“Vernal Pools”*

**Ray Stewart**



Ray Stewart is a Certified Master Rain Gardener, Certified Interpretive Guide, retired Science Teacher, Ohio Wetlands Association (OWA) Founder, Past President, and current Ambassador. As lead designer at Webbedfoot Designs, Inc., he is a Botanist, and an experienced Landscape Manager and Naturalist.

Ray led the Ohio Wetlands Association team that produced the Vernal Pool Education Package, a set of five presentations field tested by wetland experts across the state. The Package includes speaker notes, ancillary educational materials, and scholarly support materials. These were first made available at OWA's Vernal Poolooza wetland science conferences in 2019.

Ray is currently championing the use of native plants in personal landscapes as the lead designer at Webbedfoot Designs, Inc., a non-profit organization whose proceeds advance pollinator education and public pollinator gardens. He is also Vice President of Wild Ones Greater Cleveland, a non-profit that promotes ecological landscaping.

Vernal Pools is Part I of a five-part education package. This presentation provides a foundation for understanding the unique ecology of a special type of seasonal wetland we call Vernal Pools. It will show the special kinds of animals that live there, and often, nowhere else. These temporary waters are often small, overlooked, and threatened. Found mostly in wooded areas across the state, careful management will assure that these extremely productive habitats remain so.

**October Field Trips**  
**All trips are on Saturdays**  
***Guests Are Always Welcome!***

**October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 9:00 a.m.**  
**Carlisle Reservation**  
12882 Diagonal Rd  
Lagrange, OH 44050  
Chad Wilson to lead

**Ohio's First-ever American Flamingos!**  
*Phoenicopterus ruber*  
By Chad Wilson



Tandem walking American Flamingos, photo by Chad Wilson

I can't believe I'm typing this, but on Friday, September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, Ohio received a visit from two American Flamingos! They are the first ones ever recorded in Ohio and also the furthest north the species has ever been recorded!

Upon hearing the news, which George Keller reported on Facebook's Ohio Rare Bird page at 12:23 p.m., I wrapped up my work stuff and started driving down by 1 p.m. Since it was a 3 ½

hour drive, I was wondering how long it would take the flamingos to realize there are no shrimp in Ohio, pack up, and head south. But since this is most likely the most unlikely bird recorded in Ohio since I started birding, I had to try!

I picked up another birder on the way (carpooling is always preferred for long trips!) and we drove to Caesar Creek State Park beach, which is just north of Cincinnati. Upon arriving, we saw a massive crowd of birders, scopes, and cameras on the beach. There were also swimmers and a dog beach there, with a few dogs enjoying the water. And then we saw them...right off the beach in the shallow water, two American Flamingos stood, acting like they didn't have a care in the world. Amazing!

Hurricane Idalia seems to be the reason that American Flamingos scattered up into the U.S. mainland, with nine states recording them! Ohio, Kentucky, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Florida, and Texas all received flamingo fallout from the storm.

American flamingos are predominantly found in the warm, tropical and subtropical regions of the Western Hemisphere, including the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, Central America, and parts of South America. Their preferred habitats include salt flats, mudflats, coastal lagoons, and shallow estuaries where they can find their primary sources of food. These habitats provide a perfect balance of water depth and food availability for these remarkable birds.

One of the most remarkable behaviors of flamingos is their synchronized group movements. When they wade through the water, their synchronized leg movements create ripples that can be both mesmerizing and functional. This coordinated movement not only helps them find food more effectively but also confuses potential predators.

If you noticed from the cover picture, one of the flamingos is gray. It takes several years and molts for juveniles to become pink. Even then, the flamingo's pink or red color comes from its food,

including algae and shrimp, which contain carotenoid pigments that turn the flamingo's feathers pink over time.

American Flamingos also have an amazing lifespan of 40-60 years, which is probably about how long we'll have to wait for a return visit here in Ohio!

References: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2023/09/03/flamingos-all-over-east-coast-post-idalia/70738375007/>;  
<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/american-flamingo>

## **Small Grassland with Big News!**

By Danielle Squire

The Meadow Preserve at Lorain County Community College is a small example of a grassland with a big story to tell. One of seven Specialty Gardens on campus, the preserve was established in 1999 when the founder of the Black River Audubon Society, Jack Smith, observed that Bobolinks (listed as a species of concern in Ohio) appeared each spring in the northeast corner of the property. Jack rallied support from the BRAS Board and together, they met with the campus President at the time, Dr. Roy Church, to suggest that this space be protected from maintenance until late September. Dr. Church agreed and a movement to enhance this space for education, the community, and wildlife began. Species populations flourished. This movement was spearheaded in part by our dear late Harriet Alger.

Meadows are small grasslands, usually under 25 acres, characterized by their low-growing grasses densely speckled with wildflowers. They have several expressions and are defined differently by those you might ask. To a farmer back in the day, a meadow was an unmowed area of land that went untouched until high summer, where it was then harvested into hay to be used as fodder for livestock during the Winter. This definition is not far from what biologists consider meadows today, as on principle, they are neither cultivated nor permanent, but they are then left to seed. Naturally occurring meadows are usually a fleeting moment in the

timeline of nature, a story of succession and resilience after destruction or ecological transition such as a wildfire. Meadows have few or no trees found within them but as the land adjusts over time, woody species tend to make themselves at home. They continue to grow and set seed, eventually transforming the land once again, into a forest. In rare cases, oak savannahs could form where oak trees colonize 10%-50% of the canopy, surrounded by grasses and wildflowers. These are also called oak openings. For a meadow to last, it is typically managed by fire or mowing at the end of the growing season to prevent woody species from establishing. Such is the case for the Meadow Preserve at LCCC.

Grasslands are one of the most quickly disappearing ecosystems in Ohio today, second only to wetlands. Most are converted into cropland, housing developments, or are cleared for one reason or another. In fact, the National Audubon Society reports that “fewer than 40 percent of the 550 million acres of historical grasslands that once stretched from Alberta to Mexico remain today” and as such, 40% of the grassland bird populations have diminished since 1966. Many birds and other wildlife species depend on these ecosystems, some of which may surprise you. A few of these birds include Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Dickcissel, Henslow’s Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Prairie Warbler, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Sedge Wren, Upland Sandpiper, and, of course, Bobolink.

Among other species, Bobolinks stopped appearing at the LCCC Meadow Preserve. In 2015, woody species threatened to overturn the prosperity of this grassland but BRAS promptly responded in collaboration with several community partners, including the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and the issue was mitigated. Since then, the meadow has continued to transition. It is now considered to be more of a wet meadow and the species population is in flux. As a result, undesired species have become established, such as non-native grasses and teasel, but Kate Pilacky and I are planning the next steps to correct this imbalance.

Over the past few years, my conversations with Harriet *always*

came back to the Bobolinks. “Have they returned yet?”. In staying truthful, I lamentably reported that they had not, but that I was hopeful. I’ve been documenting all species found on campus, from birds to bugs, and have encouraged students and friends in the community to do the same, knowing that the more eyes we have, the more species we will find. As a result, I am beyond thrilled to tell our readers that a few short weeks after our dear Harriet gained her own wings, I received a report that Bobolinks were spotted foraging in the Meadow!



**Black River Audubon Meadow Preserve at LCCC**

## **Wetlands Protection Under Attack by the Supreme Court**

by Cheryl Wolfe-Cragin, Advocacy Chair

The summer of 2023 went on record as the third wettest summer for our region. This reminds us of the crucial role wetlands play in minimizing flooding due to their ability to absorb excess water and slowly release it. However, recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court have jeopardized future protection of wetlands. Remember,

Ohio has lost more than 95% of its wetlands, so it is important to protect what remains.

For 45 years under the Clean Water Act, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers have required discharge permits in wetlands “adjacent” to water bodies, even if a dune or other barrier separated the two. The Supreme Court has previously defined the “waters of the United States” to include not only navigable rivers and lakes, but also wetlands and waterways associated with navigable bodies of water. Many wetlands are not totally wet year-round or are not connected at the surface to larger systems. They still have important ecological connections to larger water bodies and were intended to be protected under the Clean Water Act’s objective of “restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.”

In May, the Supreme Court declared that “waters of the United States” includes only “relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water, such as streams, oceans, rivers, lakes – and wetlands that have a continuous surface connection with and are indistinguishably part of such water bodies.” This will leave long-regulated adjacent wetlands no longer protected by the Clean Water Act and could result in major negative impacts on water quality and flood control throughout the United States. The ruling leaves very little room for the EPA or the Army Corps of Engineers to create new regulations that could protect wetlands.

With the court’s requirement of a continuous surface connection, federal protection may no longer apply to areas that critically affect the water quality of U.S. rivers, lakes, and oceans. This includes seasonal streams and wetlands that are near or intermittently connected to larger bodies of water. It may also be interpreted to mean that construction of a road, levee or other barrier separating a wetland from nearby waters could remove an area from federal protection.

To “fix” this, Congress could amend the Clean Water Act to



expressly provide that “waters of the United States” includes wetlands. However, past efforts by Congress have been unsuccessful. It is questionable whether states will fill the void in regulation as many states have not adopted regulatory protections for waters that are outside the scope of “waters of the United States.” New legislation – and perhaps entirely new regulatory programs – will be needed.

Finally, and perhaps most disturbing, a concurring opinion by Justice Clarence Thomas hints at possible future targets for the court. Along with Justice Neil Gorsuch, Thomas suggested that the Clean Water Act and other federal environmental statutes lie beyond Congress’ authority to regulate activities that affect interstate commerce, and could be open to constitutional challenges.

References: Albert C. Lin, *The Conversation*, PBS News Hour, May 27, 2023.



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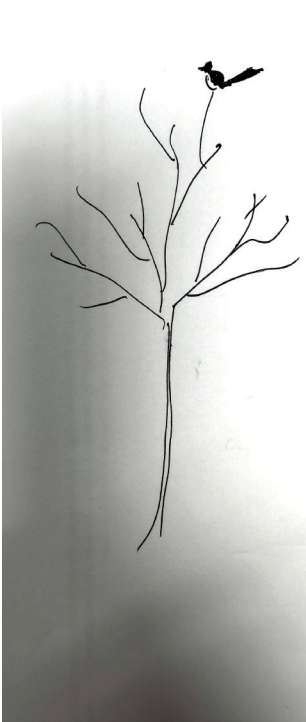
# A Bird ID Story

By Chad Wilson

In the birding community, identification discussions happen all...the...time. There are probably more days in my life with bird ID discussions than not. This one is special, however, because it has interesting visual aids.

I was minding my own business, working at home, when Debbie Parker pinged me and said she thought she just drove by a Florida Scrub-jay! “Bluish bird topside with wicked long tail and gray/white chest”, she wrote. I asked if it could have been a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and she said no, it was bigger, and she's familiar with the Florida Scrub-jays from her visits down there.

She then sketched what she saw, showing off her impressive artistic skills. I couldn't get to the spot she saw the bird for an hour, and had little hope it would still be there, but wow, it was there, in the same spot! Here's her drawing vs. my picture:



So what was the bird? I zoomed way in with my P1000 and it revealed....a Northern Mockingbird! So mystery solved, but you always have to check in Lorain County or risk missing a mega-rarity!



BOBOLINKS, photo by Chad Wilson



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

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**P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**Email: [blackriveraudubon@gmail.com](mailto:blackriveraudubon@gmail.com)**

**440-541-9170**

**[www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org)**