



# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

Past, Present & Future  
Featuring the Rocky River Important Bird Area

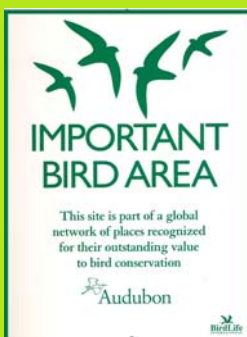
2008



## Progress Report

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# greetings

It is my pleasure to present this progress report on the activities of the Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society (WCAS), with an emphasis on the Rocky River Important Bird Area (IBA) project.

In January 2007, the WCAS Board of Directors developed a strategic plan to chart a course for the next five years. We are beginning to implement the plan, which consists of four main programs: conservation, education, partnerships, and fund-raising. Education has always been our flagship program, as our mission statement shows. We are beginning to come into our own as a conservation organization, as this report explains. Partnerships and fund-raising are capacity-building programs and are new for WCAS. They are critical for us to achieve our strategic goals.

Pages 4 to 17 of this report discuss the Rocky River IBA and explain the methodology we are using to conduct our various surveys. The report also includes findings that highlight what we discovered and are telling people in our outreach efforts.

The hallmark of WCAS is our volunteers. We can count on anywhere from 50 to 100 people to support our programs physically and financially. Page 15 recognizes those who have been active in our Rocky River IBA Forest Breeding Bird and Vegetation Surveys. They have earned their place of honor in this report.

*Tom Romito,  
President, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society*

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society is to educate the public about conservation of the natural world through member involvement in chapter activities and community outreach.

# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ROCKY RIVER IBA PROJECT

- Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are tracts of land that the National Audubon Society has determined are crucial to the existence of birds and other wildlife because of their habitat quality. National Audubon Society has identified over 500 IBAs throughout the United States.
- In 2000, Audubon Ohio, the state office of the National Audubon Society, designated the Rocky River watershed (East Branch) as an Important Bird Area.
- In 2005, WCAS adopted the Rocky River IBA with a view to monitor bird populations in the Rocky River watershed (East Branch) as an indicator of ecosystem health. By collecting credible data, we hope to influence wise land use decisions that will help sustain the natural resources of the Rocky River watershed for future generations.
- WCAS sponsored an Open House in March 2006 and training session in April 2006 for volunteers who would actively participate in the breeding bird survey for the Rocky River IBA. Cleveland Metroparks staff hosted the event at the Rocky River Nature Center, and they were instrumental in training volunteers according to strict survey protocols.
- In 2006, WCAS conducted the first year of the Rocky River IBA breeding bird survey.
- In 2007, WCAS conducted the second year of the Rocky River IBA breeding bird survey.
- WCAS honored its Rocky River IBA volunteers at the end of each survey year with an appreciation dinners at the Rocky River Nature Center.
- In May 2007, a Birdathon raised awareness of the Rocky River IBA and raised funds to support it.
- WCAS expanded its Rocky River IBA study in 2007 by including a Vegetation Survey to evaluate habitat conditions at point count locations. Volunteers surveyed vegetation at all 62 bird monitoring points.
- We are exploring ways to add new survey elements in coming years including vernal pools, amphibians, headwater streams, and wetlands.
- On May 26, 2007, Stan Searles, Curator of Ornithology at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, walked 31 miles through the Rocky River IBA to raise awareness of the Rocky River IBA to city officials, public and media. Stan's daughter Katie Genovese and WCAS President Tom Romito accompanied him on the walk from Hinckley Reservation through Mill Stream Run Reservation and Rocky River Reservation.
- WCAS volunteers who participated in the IBA studies numbered 100 by the end of 2007 survey season. Volunteers come from all age groups, residing in cities throughout Cuyahoga, Lake, and Medina counties. They participated in the breeding bird survey and vegetation survey and staffing at key events.
- WCAS officers and friends conducted public outreach talks throughout Ohio to promote the Rocky River IBA. Venues included the Audubon Ohio State Assembly in November 2006 in Columbus; the Town & Country Co-op in Medina in September 2007; and a meeting of the local mayors in Middleburg Heights in January 2008.

# The Rocky River Important Bird Area Survey

## INTRODUCTION

Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society (WCAS) has adopted the Rocky River Important Bird Area (IBA) to develop a well-coordinated program to assess the bird populations throughout the area and draw attention to the natural resources of the Rocky River. The Rocky River IBA extends from the headwaters of the river near Hinckley northwest along its East Branch to North Olmsted, then northeast to Lake Erie. While three reservations of the Cleveland Metroparks comprise a large portion of the Rocky River IBA, private parcels exist throughout the watershed, as the map on page 19 shows.

While, Audubon Ohio recognizes the importance of the Rocky River IBA, the relative conservation value of the forests and wetlands tracts in the area has not heretofore been assessed for bird populations. Moreover, ever increasing development in this area suggests the need for data on bird population changes to document the effects of urbanization.

### Need for data is key

While a relationship between habitat loss and bird population declines is accepted, no specific data exists for the Rocky River watershed. Without this data, landholders and community and watershed planners may make decisions on land use based upon incomplete information. Valuable public and private forests and wetland that serve as wildlife habitat and storm-water buffers may be under imminent threat of loss.

WCAS is helping Cleveland Metroparks and Audubon Ohio rectify this situation. Our goal is to establish credible and detailed information about the environmental resources in the Rocky River watershed through completion of a multi-year Forest Breeding Bird Survey. This initiative, because it is one of the first detailed examinations of avian resources in the Rocky River watershed, is critical to help inform and direct decision-makers about the land use decisions they are facing. The objectives of the survey are to document the abundance of forest breeding birds; monitor population trends;

evaluate habitat, land use and other local factors that impact breeding birds now or in the future; and effectively communicate the information to public and private stakeholders and decision-makers, who have a potential impact on the habitat and breeding bird populations within the Rocky River IBA. As annual data accumulate, we will have the ability to make defensible statements about bird population trends and their link to environmental and land use data.

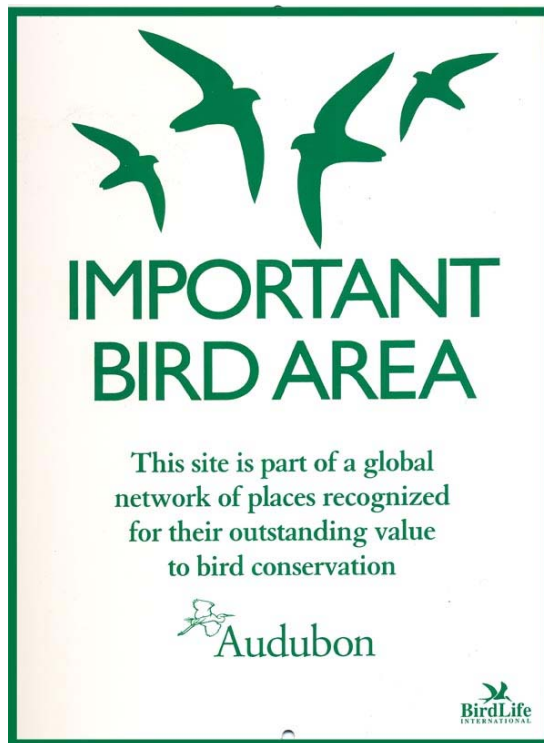
### Methodology

Our first step in evaluating the Rocky River IBA is to accurately assess the diversity and abundance of the various breeding birds in the area. The bird monitoring methods use a point count system that is also utilized by the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center as a monitoring technique. Dr. Dan Petit, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, who at the time of the 2006 survey was Chief of the Natural Resources Division of Cleve-

land Metroparks, trained and tested volunteers to count birds at points randomly selected throughout the forested areas of the Rocky River IBA.

### Survey includes vegetation

As an expansion of the bird survey in 2007, we completed a vegetation survey at our point count locations. Linking vegetation habitat data and bird point count data will enable us to make statements about the kinds of habitat where birds are found. Additionally, we have volunteered to assist with studies to assess headwater streams, vernal pools, and amphibian populations as well as expand the bird census to additional habitats such as wetlands. Together, these studies will give WCAS and our partners the information needed to influence wise land use decisions.



## Volunteers are now ambassadors

WCAS now has members trained and experienced in these bird and vegetation study criteria that can manage future efforts. The year 2006 was the first of the planned five year study with 50 WCAS members and others participating in the survey. In 2007, our volunteer base doubled to over 100 volunteers participating in the breeding bird survey and associated studies. We provided bird point count and vegetation data to Cleveland Metroparks staff, who will incorporate use the data as part of their long-term monitoring program to track ecosystem health of the park system.

Data collection is only the beginning step in an evolving, holistic conservation initiative in the Rocky River watershed. This report disseminates results to our stakeholders. We will continue to conduct public outreach appearances to inform and educate the public about the Rocky River IBA project.

To this end, WCAS members and volunteers have staffed booths and presented Rocky River IBA concerns at multiple events both local and statewide. These events have included the Rocky River Watershed Festival; the Rocky River Nature Festival; the Conservation Symposium at the Cleveland Museum of National History; Ohio Ornithological Society's Sparrow Symposium; the Glenville Heritage Festival; School Days at Edgewater; and Science Olympiad, an educational event sponsored by Cleveland State University.

A key forum for support of the Rocky River IBA was the presentation by WCAS staff at the Audubon Ohio State Assembly, where attendees representing environmental agencies and groups from all over Ohio indicated their interest in setting up similar IBA studies as WCAS has done. WCAS's Rocky River IBA study, with its extensive volunteer base and public outreach, is one of the most comprehensive IBA studies in Ohio.

## IBA TIMELINE

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Training and testing of volunteers	Training and testing of volunteers	Training and testing of volunteers	Training and testing of volunteers	Training and testing of volunteers
Year 1 survey	Year 2 survey	Year 3 survey	Year 4 survey	Year 5 survey
Appreciation dinner for volunteers	Appreciation dinner for volunteers	Initial report to stakeholders		Progress report to stakeholders
	Strategic planning workshop	Stakeholder workshop		
	Vegetation survey	Additional components (vernal pools, salamanders, headwater streams)		
	Outreach appearances			

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROCKY RIVER IMPORTANT BIRD AREA PROJECT

Important Bird Areas (IBA) are tracts of land that the National Audubon Society has determined are crucial to the existence of birds and other wildlife because of their habitat quality. In 2000, Audubon Ohio, the state office of the National Audubon Society, designated the Rocky River watershed (East Branch) as an IBA. The Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society (WCAS), a local chapter of the National Audubon Society and Audubon Ohio, has adopted as one of its goals, the completion of an IBA Forest Breeding Bird Survey to document the status of breeding bird populations in the Rocky River valley

Planning began in August 2005 with the formation of committees to address three project components deemed critical for success: the Study Group; Coordinator Group; and the Dedication Group.

The Study Group was tasked with developing procedures and training designed to implement the survey. This extensive planning involved thorough training for volunteers about local bird diversity and technical survey procedures.



The Coordinator Group focused on hiring our Rocky River IBA Coordinator with responsibilities to including the administration of the breeding bird survey, data management, and developing and distributing survey results. Other duties include representing the Rocky River IBA at public and private meetings, soliciting participation of volunteers, and developing new funding opportunities. The IBA Coordinator was hired May 2006, and continues with us today.

The Dedication Group was charged with planning a “Kick-Off” dedication ceremony of the Rocky River IBA to both public and private entities. This dedication event has evolved into the annual Rocky River IBA Walk (See page 18, “Not just another walk in the park”).

### Forest breeding bird survey implementation

To celebrate the adoption of the Rocky River IBA and set the stage for implementation of the survey, WCAS sponsored an open house in March 2006 and a training session in April 2006 for interested parties and potential volunteers that would actively participate in the Forest Breeding Bird Survey. Both events were held at the Rocky River Nature Center in Cleveland Metroparks.

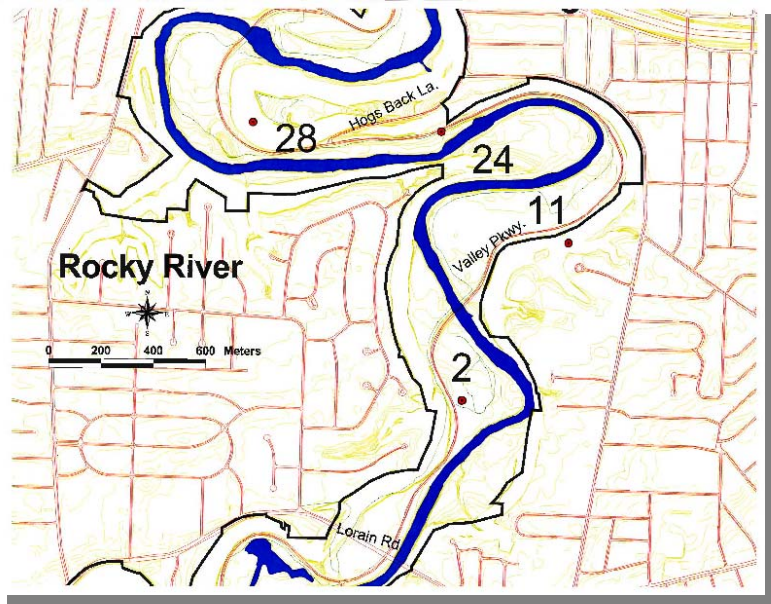


Hundreds of visitors attended the open house to learn about bird diversity and volunteer opportunities. From these visitors, a select group of volunteers came to attend the training session in April, which included both indoor and outdoor training and testing components. After testing, survey teams were assembled that consist of an observer and one or more recorders. Observers were required to pass rigorous qualification tests on bird identification both by sight and song. A score of 80 percent was required to qualify as an Observer. People who did not qualify as Observers were designated as Recorders.

## Criteria for choosing bird survey stations

Two hundred potential bird point count survey stations were distributed randomly throughout the Rocky River valley (East Branch) using a geographic information system and topographic maps of each Cleveland Metroparks reservation. Because our survey is designed specifically to quantify bird abundance within mature forests and woodlands, points were evaluated on the ground to ensure they met certain criteria. First, the points had to be inside a mature forest or mature woodland. A mature forest or woodland is defined here as having a stand of trees covering a continuous area of at least two hectares (about five acres) with an average tree canopy height of at least six meters and canopy cover of at least 50 percent. Forests have more than 70 percent canopy cover, a higher density of trees, and branches and foliage from separate trees often meet or interlock. Woodlands have a more open canopy than forests, with trees spaced further apart (50-70 percent canopy cover). However, various sized gaps can occur within both forests and woodlands.

Second, points had to be at least 50 meters from a “large edge”, which is a linear opening adjacent to a forest or woodland that is at least 30 meters wide, such as a road, utility, or right-of-way, or a canopy opening greater than 1,000 square meters (about 33 meters by 33 meters) such as borders of farm fields, residential yards, or picnic areas.



Third, all points needed to be located within a reservation of Cleveland Metroparks or other public land. And finally, each point had to be at least 250 meters from the next survey point.

With these criteria in mind, WCAS volunteers evaluated the 200 computer-generated points. If the criteria were met, the volunteers wrote descriptions of the point locations, collected UTM coordinates using GPS units, and marked the plot centers with colored ribbons. If any one of the criteria were violated, the point was discarded. The final 60 point count stations were located in either Rocky River Reservation, Mill Stream Run Reservation, and Hinckley Reservation.

## Survey teams do the work

Procedures for relocating point count stations, recording data on bird survey forms, and submitting completed survey forms to the IBA Coordinator were standardized. Observer-Recorder teams were each assigned five separate point count stations. Each team received a paper map, written description, and GPS coordinates of each point. The teams visited their points three times during the breeding season from June 1 to July 15, 2006. Consecutive surveys at the same station were separated by at least six days. With 60 points in place, and each site surveyed three times, a total of 180 surveys were completed. The IBA Coordinator collected the survey forms for coding and compilation. In 2007, the process was repeated although WCAS added two additional points in an area deemed to be under-represented in the initial placement of points.

## Point count protocols

WCAS utilized established protocols for variable distance point counts to ensure that the quality of data collected at point count stations was not compromised because of variation among observers in conducting the survey.

SPECIES	Male			Female			Unknown			TOTAL
	0-25	26-50	>50	0-25	26-50	>50	0-25	26-50	>50	
Titmouse			3							3
Blue Jay			1							1
Robin			1							1
Red Wing			1							1
Starling			1							1
Chimney Swift			1							1
Blue Jay			1							1
Robin			1							1

Point counts are used to estimate the bird abundance and species richness by counting birds and recording the distance from the observer during a set length of time at a predetermined location. Each individual bird detected by call or sight is recorded within three distance bands, 0-25 meters, 26-50 meters, and greater than 50 meters. The point count is the actual recording of birds. The protocol dictates that only the Observer identifies species and distances to birds and announces when the survey period has ended. The Recorder does not identify or point out birds to the Observer, but only records data using the Rocky River Important Bird Area Forest Bird Survey data form shown at left.

Counts are conducted between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Surveys are not completed during inclement weather, including rainy days and days when the wind consistently exceeds about ten miles per hour. On overcast, cool, or other days when temperature and sky conditions do not appear to be causing a decrease in singing or other activities of birds, counts may continue until 11:00 a.m. It is appropriate to vary the times the observations are done at a point to capture more data. Count duration at a station is ten minutes. The exact time, (hour, minute, second) is recorded upon initiating the count. A chronometer or alarm on a watch is recommended to assure accuracy.

Counts begin when the Observer is approaching and within 25 meters of the marked point count station center. The Observer must stand at the center of the point count circle during the count, but the Observer may shift positions slightly to get better detection. However, movements must be kept to a minimum, and the Observer must stay near the center of the station. No birds are counted after the ten-minute period, even if they are in the point count circle.

Teams record actual birds within forest or woodland habitats, and not birds located in other habitats, such as adjacent fields or backyards. Fly-throughs (below the canopy) can be counted, but birds flying over the canopy (fly-overs) are usually not, unless they are species that usually forage above trees while in flight, such as chimney swifts.

Teams record species either by full name or by the four-letter American Ornithologists Union (AOU) acronym. For final evaluation of data, all bird species names were coded using the AOU acronym for consistency in data analysis.



# What We Found

Findings from the 2006-2007 Forest Breeding Bird Survey are shown in the following tables:



**WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY**

## Forest Bird Survey Project

Categories	2006	2007
Individual birds counted	2095	2261
Surveys conducted	180	186
Species counted	74	67

The total number of birds counted, and the total number of species detected was similar between 2006 and 2007. Two survey points were added during 2007, which increased the total number of surveys by six (three surveys for each point).



**WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY**

## Forest Bird Survey Project

Total Number by Reservations	2006	2007
Rocky River Reservation	760 Birds	776 Birds
Mill Stream Run Reservation	709 Birds	912 Birds
Hinckley Reservation	629 Birds	573 Birds
TOTAL Number	2098 Birds	2261 Birds

The total number of birds documented in each reservation is shown. Differences between years may or may not indicate true shifts in bird populations.

Surveys need to be continued through additional years to establish trends and quantify findings before conclusions can be drawn.



Baltimore Oriole © Dave Lewis

### DID YOU KNOW?

- May 18, 2006: WCAS board hired Diane Sigler as IBA Coordinator.

# What We Found



## Top 6 Birds (Total Number)

2006	2007
American Robin (197)	American Robin (201)
Red-eyed Vireo (183)	Red-eyed Vireo (198)
Northern Cardinal (159)	Northern Cardinal (198)
Blue Jay (105)	Blue Jay (135)
American Goldfinch (103)	Black-capped Chickadee (103)
Black-capped Chickadee (79)	American Goldfinch (78)



American Robin © Dave Lewis

The top four species are identical for both survey years, but the American Goldfinch and Black-capped Chickadee exchanged places.



## Species of Note – 2007 (2006)



Scarlet Tanager © C. H. Warren

White-breasted Nuthatch	46	(38)
Acadian Flycatcher	42	(49)
Scarlet Tanager	31	(16)
Hooded Warbler	26	(45)
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	11	(5)
Ovenbird	7	(20)
Prothonotary Warbler	4	(0)
Blue-winged Warbler	4	(5)
Pine Warbler	2	(0)
Louisiana Waterthrush	0	(2)
Cerulean Warbler	0	(1)

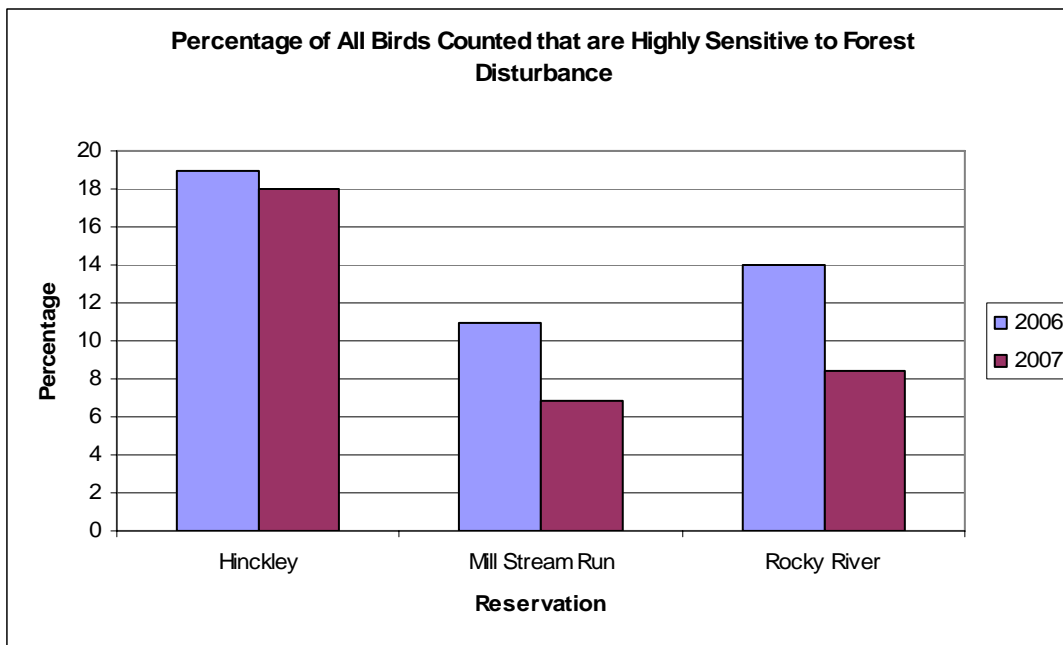
Others— all add to the diversity

Some species prefer forest or woodland habitat, and some of these are more sensitive to disturbance than others. This table shows the fluctuation in count numbers for species that may be useful indicators for tracking the health of the Rocky River IBA.

# Analysis of Our Findings

<u>Species</u>	<u>Habitat</u>	<u>Sensitivity</u>
Acadian flycatcher	Forest	High
American goldfinch	Field	Low
American robin	General	Low
Black-capped chickadee	Woodland	Low
Blue jay	General	Low
Blue-winged warbler	Field	Low
Cerulean warbler	Forest	High
Hooded warbler	Forest	High
Louisiana waterthrush	Forest	High
Northern cardinal	General	Low
Ovenbird	Forest	High
Pine warbler	Forest	Medium
Prothonotary warbler	Forest	Medium
Red-eyed vireo	Forest	Medium
Scarlet tanager	Forest	High
White-breasted nuthatch	Woodland	Low

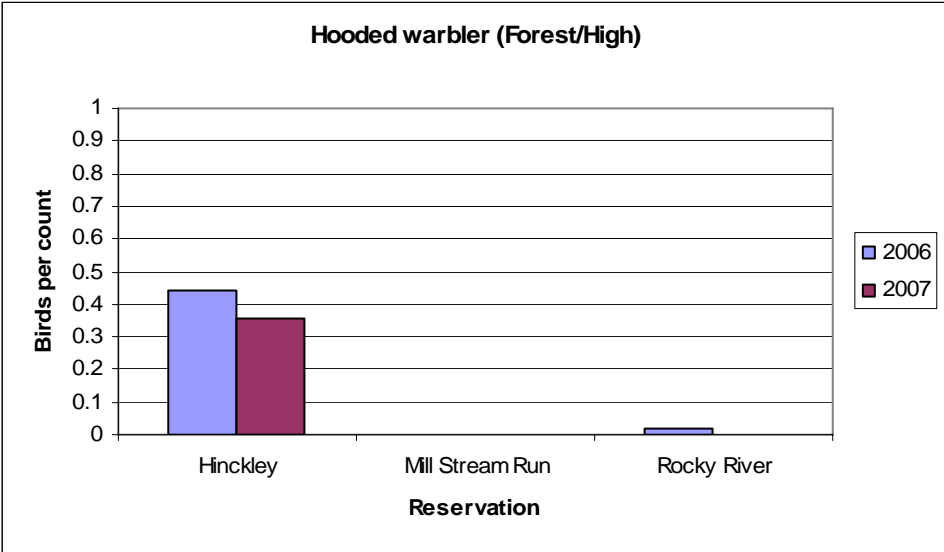
To assist with analysis, species were classified as to their preferred habitat and their sensitivity to disturbance. For example, ovenbirds are termed forest interior birds that need large blocks of undisturbed, continuous forest to reproduce successfully. On the other hand, Northern cardinals are generalists that live comfortably in urban and wooded environments and tolerate high levels of disturbance. Monitoring birds of all groups will help us understand habitat changes in the Rocky River IBA.



While analysis with only two years data is very preliminary, some expected trends do seem to be appearing. This graph shows the proportion of highly sensitive forest birds detected (within 50 meters) as a percentage of all birds observed. There is an indication that a greater proportion of birds with high sensitivity to disturbance are found in Hinckley Reservation compared to Mill Stream Run and Rocky River reservations. Hinckley Reservation has a greater proportion of forest interior habitat (versus forest edge or disturbed).

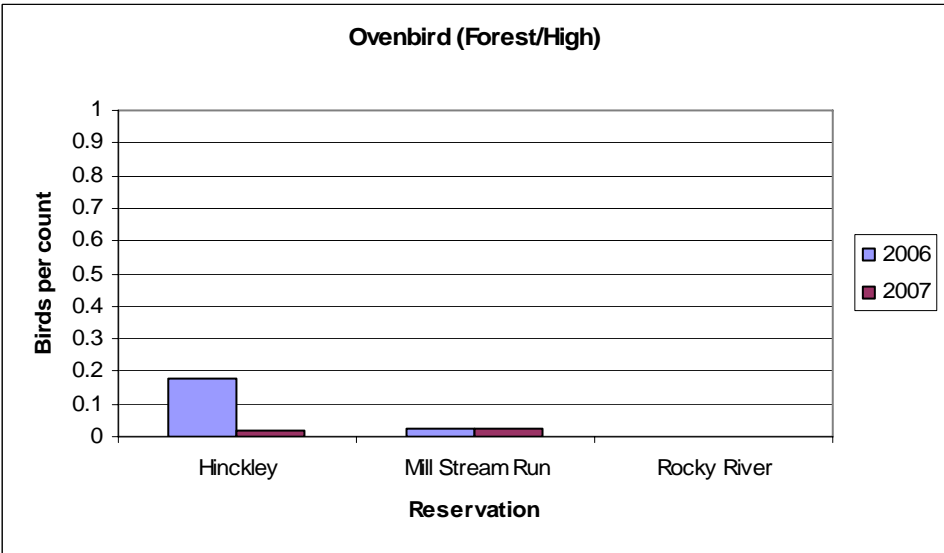
# Analysis of Our Findings

The following graphs depict the average number of birds for a particular species detected per 10 minute point count (within 50m) in each of the three reservations. Again, this data is preliminary in nature, and rigorous statistical analysis is pending.

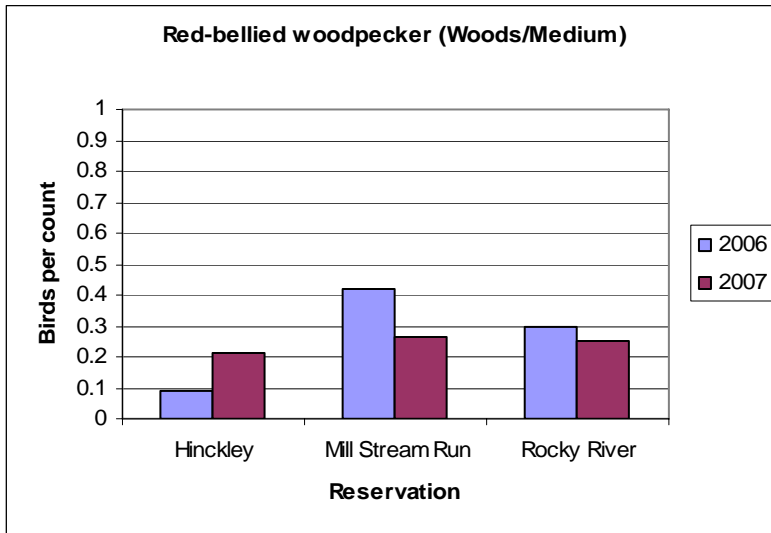


These two graphs indicate that Hooded warblers and Ovenbirds, which are species that prefer forested habitat and are highly sensitive to disturbance, are observed more frequently in Hinckley Reservation where there are more contiguous forests and fewer roads, fields and development than the other two reservations.

However, the yearly and geographical variation in detection rates is notable because it tells us that longer term data collection is needed to quantify true population changes in these more infrequently encountered species.

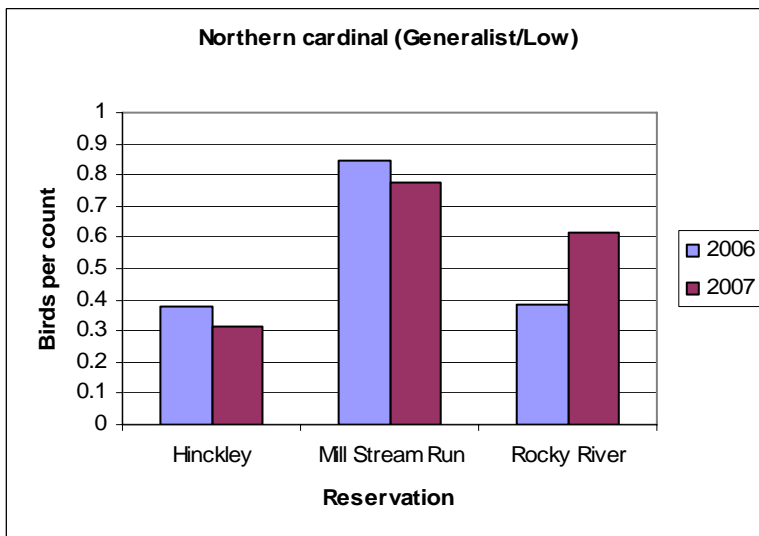
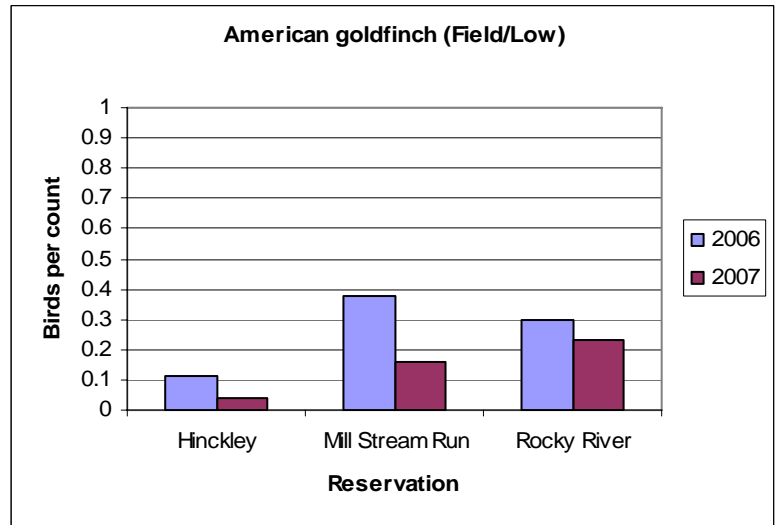


# Analysis of Our Findings



Species that are less sensitive to disturbance seem to be encountered more often in all of the reservations. The Red-bellied woodpecker and American goldfinch are examples of species that are commonly found throughout Cleveland Metroparks

Mill Stream Run and Rocky River reservations, with more edgy and open areas than Hinckley Reservation, seemed to draw slightly greater numbers of Red-bellied woodpeckers and American goldfinches.



Northern cardinals, one of our most abundant species, were generally detected more frequently in Mill Stream Run and Rocky River reservations. Studies at Ohio State University indicate that cardinals are a species that has adapted well to disturbed habitats.

# Volunteers– Thank you!

Following are the people who have volunteered their time and talents for the Rocky River IBA project.

## Point Finders:

John Andes  
Liz Clingman  
Holly DiBin  
Joanne Gorges  
Terry Gorges  
Don Howell  
Rich Kassouf  
Andy Lihani  
Tom Romito  
Colin Sheppard  
Kathleen Tiburzi



## Data Input

Nancy Bucher  
Mary Anne Romito



## Observers:

Ken Ballas  
Bill Deininger  
Dave Dvorak  
Chris Flynn  
Henry Fortlage  
Dave Grasskemper  
Nancy Howell  
Mary Lou Hura  
Tim Krynak  
Paula Lozano  
Terri Martincic  
Dan Petit  
Mary Anne Romito

## Recorders:

Kit Birch  
Mary Cruz  
Cathy Flynn  
Robert Finkelstein  
Stefanie Spear  
Kathleen Tiburzi

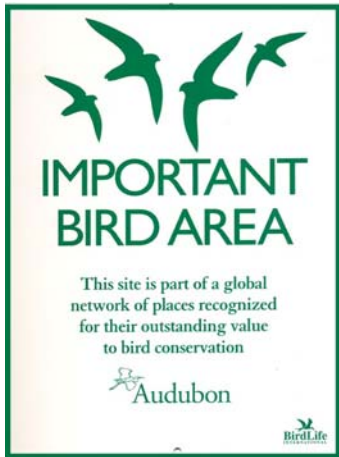
## Vegetation Surveyors

Nidia Arguedas  
Andrew Bilokonsky  
Kit Birch  
Kathleen Bradley  
Nancy Brewer  
Marti Burrows  
Marilyn Cornick  
Karen Czerniawski  
Lee Czerniawski  
Dave Dvorak  
Joanne Gorges  
Terry Gorges  
Betty Green  
Don Howell  
John Katko  
Terri Martincic  
Adam Martincic  
Jamie Martincic  
Joe Martincic  
Eric Obloy  
Laura Obloy  
Ryan Obloy

Penny O'Connor  
Beth Pasek  
Jessica Peck  
Michelle Peck  
Dan Petit  
Lara Roketenetz  
Mary Anne Romito  
Tom Romito  
Linda Sekura  
Colin Sheppard  
Lisa Sheppard  
Diane Sigler  
Ray Stewart  
Marie Sullivan  
Kathleen Tiburzi  
Carol Wilson

## Photographers:

Dave Lewis  
Penny O'Connor  
Terri Martincic  
Diane Sigler  
Mary Anne Romito  
C. H. Warren



## OBSERVERS, RECORDERS, POINT FINDERS

Rocky River Important Bird Area volunteers participated in many aspects of our forest breeding bird survey.



Points Finders spent many hours evaluating, selecting and tagging point count locations.



Each point was visited three times during the survey by the Observer and Recorder teams who documented birds seen or heard.



Bird counts were not the only observations made. Other habitat impacts from white-tailed deer and human impacts such as traffic noise and air traffic noise were very evident.



## ROCKY RIVER IBA COMPANION STUDY: VEGETATION SURVEY



Vegetation surveys were completed in 2007 to evaluate habitat characteristics at all 62 point count locations. Led by Dan Petit, former Cleveland Metroparks Chief of Natural Resources, volunteers were trained on June 16, 2007 in sampling protocol and plant identification. Data was error-checked and entered into a database for analysis.

The vegetation survey was designed to describe the habitat at each point as many bird species have specific habitat needs. Each of the 62 points has four subplots, each measuring five meters in radius within a larger 50 meter circle. Vegetation survey protocol



includes the following steps:



five meters.

- Trees and shrubs over 1.4 meters tall are identified (genus or species), measured and counted. Woody plant seedlings and shrubs are counted if they are above 25 centimeters, or ankle height.
- The vegetation profile structure is determined with a telescoping pole. "Hits" are recorded when leaves touch the pole between 0 and .5 meters; .5 meters to one meters; one meter to two meters; two meters to three meters; three meters to four meters; four meters to
- Canopy height is measured from the center of the circle using an infrared range finder.
- Percentage of canopy leaf cover from the center subplot is measured using densitometers (shown to the right)
- Slope; aspect, direction of the slope; distance to large and small open areas; distance to water sources; any other pertinent comments, were documented.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- April 6, 2004: WCAS board, spearheaded by Kit Birch, promoted Audubon shade-grown coffee as fund-raiser and refreshment at chapter meetings.



## NOT JUST ANOTHER WALK IN THE PARK



Some people will go to extreme lengths to promote their local Important Bird Area. Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society member Stan Searles, who is also the Curator of Ornithology at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, decided the best way to promote the Rocky River IBA was to walk it from Hinckley, Ohio north to Lake Erie. The 31 mile route follows the Rocky River past the towns of Strongsville, Berea, Olmsted Falls, North Olmsted, Fairview Park, and Rocky River. It passes through private lands and three reservations of Cleveland Metroparks: Hinckley, Mill Stream Run, and Rocky River Reservations.

Stan was joined by his daughter, Katie Genovese, and WCAS President Tom Romito for the walk. At 6:00 a.m. on May 26, 2007, the team set out for a leisurely stroll. Almost 11½ hours later, they completed the walk foot-sore but happy at 5:20 p.m. Several WCAS members and friends provided support along the walk.

Mr. Searles conceived the walk as a way to draw public attention to the IBA. "There is no better way to educate people about the IBA than to meet them personally and talk to them." Well spoken! Public reception was extremely positive with several people stopping both on foot and in vehicles to ask questions about the walk, the IBA, and to voice concerns about preserving habitat for birds.



The *Not Just Another Walk in the Park* will be repeated on a grand scale on May 24, 2008. The Memorial Day weekend event is currently in the planning stages and will involve a repeat of the 31 mile walk for the swift of foot, a shortened

version for others, and a duathlon for fitness clubs that takes place within the environs of Cleveland Metroparks. The event will raise funds through registration fees, sponsorships, and pledges for the Rocky River IBA.





# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

## Weeders in the Wild



Weeders in the Wild is the brainchild of WCAS board member Terri Martinic. WCAS members and volunteers give a new meaning to hands-on activity by physically giving a helping hand to the habitat of the Rocky River watershed. Weeders in the Wild events have targeted several species of invasive plants including phragmites and lesser celandine that have taken over local parks and arboretums. Volunteers march through stands of invasive plants with the sole purpose of eradicating them so that native plants can make a comeback. Introduced invasive plants aggressively take over natural areas robbing valuable habitat from native species. Invasive removal event dates are scheduled and published in the *Weeders in the Wild* brochure, WCAS web site, and are highlighted at

monthly WCAS meeting and programs. WCAS supplies equipment such as clippers and gloves. The events are



### NATIVE PLANT PROMOTION BROCHURE

Native habitats can easily be impacted by what people plant on their own property because of seed dispersal by wind and animals. Whether this impact is positive or negative is determined by the plant species that are introduced in an area. With this in mind, an information card, *Help Ohio's Natural Habitats - Buy Native Plants* was developed in 2006 through sponsorship by WCAS, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Natural Resources Conservation Service, EarthWatch Ohio, and Audubon Ohio. The native plant information card identifies recommended native plants that attract birds and butterflies, as well as listing non-native invasive plants to avoid that harm Ohio's natural habitats.

**Recommended Native Plants;** Bluestem; Milkweed; Flowering Dogwood; Coneflower; Joe-Pye Weed; Blazing Star; Spice Bush; Beebalm; Virginia Creeper; Vervain; Ironweed; Green Headed Coneflower; Maple-leaved Viburnum.

**Non-Native Invasive Plants to Avoid:** Tree-of-Heaven; Barberry; Vetch; Russian Olive; English Ivy; Honey-suckle; Privet; Purple Loosestrife; Pachysandra; Knotweed; Buckthorn; Myrtle (*Vinca minor*); Reed Canary Grass.



**HELP OHIO'S  
NATURAL HABITATS  
BUY NATIVE  
PLANTS**

### DID YOU KNOW?

- June 1985: President Rich Kassouf spearheaded WCAS's first annual picnic and plant exchange.

# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS

## Stakeholder workshops promote the Rocky River IBA

Beginning in late 2007, WCAS began conducting workshops with community stakeholders throughout the Rocky River IBA. In November, President Tom Romito and Stan Searles, Curator of Birds for Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, spoke to the Town & Country Co-op in Medina, and in January, the two spoke to a meeting of council members, developers, and citizens from several communities in Middleburg Heights. In February, Tom attended the Home and Garden Show at the IX Center and engaged many participants about the Rocky River IBA.



**Stan Searles addresses community members about the IBA in Middleburg Heights.**

These workshops enable WCAS to spread the message about its work in the Rocky River IBA. They provide a platform for educating the public about the importance of preserving the area for future generations to enjoy.

## WCAS and the future of Dike 14

WCAS is a member of the Dike 14 Environmental Education Collaborative. At the monthly meetings, WCAS voices support of the Dike 14 Nature Preserve at East 72nd Street in Cleveland. The preserve itself has been designated as an Important Bird Area. Events planned by the Collaborative provide an excellent venue to promote the IBA to the public as well as officials that are associated directly with the Collaborative, who includes the City of Cleveland public officials. Members of the collaborative include representatives from the following groups: Cleveland Botanical Garden; Cleveland Metroparks; Cleveland Museum of Natural History; Cuyahoga Valley National Park Association; Earth Day coalition; Lake Erie Nature and Science Center; The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes; and the Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society.

Using grant funding, the each Collaborative member has contributed materials for an environmental education package to be used by educators for school children from fourth to eighth grade. The WCAS Discovery packet portion focuses on bird adaptation and habitat issues.

## WCAS partners with Rocky River Watershed Council to protect IBA

In 2007, WCAS and the Rocky River Watershed Council (RRWC) developed a partnership to promote and protect the Rocky River watershed. RRWC is a non-profit organization that exists to protect, restore, and perpetuate the Rocky River watershed through public education, watershed planning, communication, and cooperation among stakeholders. Because the goals and geography of concern of our two organizations are so similar, both parties saw this as a perfect match.

The signature event of RRWC is its annual Rocky River Watershed Festival, whose purpose is to promote awareness of the watershed, shown on the map on page 19. WCAS participated in the festival on September 29, 2007, as a partnering organization. WCAS hopes to continue this collaboration by involving RRWC members in the second annual IBA walk on May 24.

RRWC accomplishes its work through a network of stakeholders who advocate the goals of a watershed action plan to local government and communities.

## Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society abbreviated history

*Look for more excerpts of WCAS history throughout this report. For a complete history, go to our website at [www.wcasohio.org](http://www.wcasohio.org)*

- August 15, 1975: Concerned citizens hold an organizational meeting at the home of Mac and Carol Ball in Berea. WCAS publishes the first edition of the chapter newsletter with Carol Ball as editor, a position she will hold until 2002.
- December 1975: WCAS conducts its first Christmas Bird Count, a tradition that continues today.
- 1982-1983: WCAS participates in the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas I.
- March 6, 1984: WCAS begins holding its membership meetings at the Rocky River Interpretive Center, which a month later is renamed the Rocky River Nature Center.
- January 1985: The National Audubon Society launches Audubon Adventures. WCAS begins to participate with Paula Lozano as Education Chair.
- June 1985: WCAS holds its first annual picnic and plant exchange at Mastick picnic area.
- January 27, 1990: WCAS receives an IRS letter of determination designating the chapter a non-profit 501c(3) organization.
- May 1990: Past President Dave LeGallee is elected treasurer of WCAS, a position he will hold until 2003.
- October 1993: WCAS adopts Donald Gray Gardens as part of Cleveland's Adopt-a-Park program. Conservation Chair Mary Jo Lakner-Segal spearheads the effort to clean up the site, repair stonework, and prepare the soil for a natural garden.
- January 1997: Donald Gray Gardens preservation project ends with demolition of Municipal Stadium and destruction of Donald Gray Gardens.
- February 1997: WCAS begins fund-raising for plantings at city properties to create wildlife habitat, under the leadership of Mary Jo Lakner-Segal.
- February 1999: WCAS participates for the first time in Cleveland State University's Science Olympiad, a tradition they continue to the present.
- December 2002: WCAS institutes chapter memberships, whereby dues stay with WCAS and are not apportioned to National Audubon Society. Members can join at Basic or Enhanced level.
- January 2004: WCAS constructs a website and begins posting newsletters on the web page. Mary Anne Romito volunteers to serve as webmaster and performs this service to the present.
- April 2004: WCAS participates in first Rocky River Nature Festival. Board begins Weeders in the Wild program with Terri Martincic as organizer.
- September 8, 2004: Board decides to fully fund all teachers who want to use Audubon Adventures classroom packets and allocates \$500 for this purpose.
- May 3, 2005: Tom Romito steps down from presidency of WCAS to focus on Rocky River IBA as chapter conservation project. Board decides to rotate chair from month to month.
- August 20, 2005: WCAS plans for adoption of the Rocky River IBA and conceives five-year bird monitoring project with Cleveland Metroparks.
- April 25, 2006: Board launches Audubon At Home initiative with pocket card identifying native and invasive plants, spearheaded by Terri Martincic.
- January 6, 2007: Board conducts strategic planning workshop, facilitated by Jerry Tinianow, Executive Director of Audubon Ohio. Result is four overarching goals with action plan.
- February 18, 2007: WCAS annexes Brunswick and Hinckley townships to chapter area.
- July 9-August 10, 2007: Audubon Ohio conducts Urban Conservation Camp at Cleveland Greenhouse for 25 Glenville-area children. WCAS supports the effort.

**Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society**  
**CONDENSED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES**

Year ended June 30, 2007

**REVENUES:**

Grants and contributions.....	\$6,237
Safety net from Audubon Ohio.....	2,583
Chapter dues.....	2,115
Fund-raising events.....	1,022
Sales.....	720

**Total Revenues.....12,768**

**EXPENSES:**

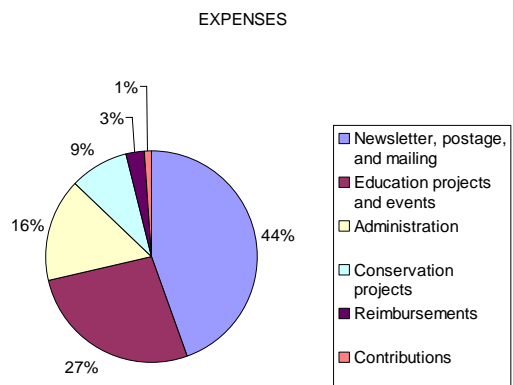
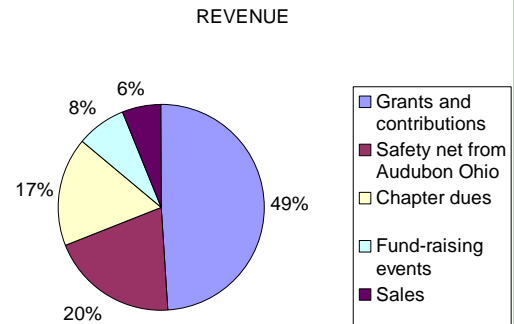
Newsletter, postage, and mailing.....	\$3,384
Education projects and events.....	2,026
Administration.....	1,225
Reimbursements.....	210
Conservation projects.....	696
Contributions.....	60

**Total Expenses.....7,602**

**ASSETS**

Reserved funds.....	6,000
Unreserved funds.....	6,757

**Total assets.....\$12,757**



**DID YOU KNOW?**

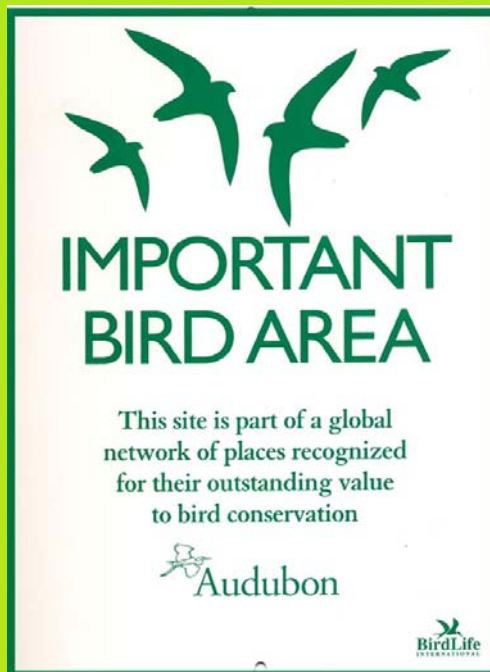
- March 6, 2007: President Tom Romito presented a check for \$5,000 from the George Gund Foundation to Treasurer Nancy Howell at a chapter membership meeting. Grant will defray expenses of IBA project.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- 1989: WCAS worked with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the City of Cleveland, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a land use plan for Dike 14.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- 1982: Past President Jim Hamilton and John Edwards, Conservation Chair, presented testimony to U.S. Congressman Dennis Eckhart in Cleveland on the Clean Air Act.



THE GEORGE  
GUND  
FOUNDATION



Production of this document and the work of the Rocky River Important Bird Area Breeding Bird Survey and Vegetation Survey were supported by the following:

Audubon Ohio  
Cleveland Museum of Natural History  
Gund Foundation  
Cleveland Metroparks  
Cleveland Metroparks Zoo  
Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society



**Western Cuyahoga  
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Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society 2008

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