

Birding by Kayak and More

by OYBC student members:

Joey Tomei, Jacob Stinnett, Kat Seeley, and Nathan Martineau

This is a recap of our June 9, 2012 Kayaking and Birding field trip at The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition at Twin Lakes in Powell, Ohio.



Morning Kayaking and Birding by *Joey Tomei*

The Ohio Young Birders Club members met on Saturday, June 9 at The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition (TAASC) in Powell, Ohio to go on a kayaking and bird watching tour at Twin Lakes, an inlet to the Scioto River in Powell, Ohio. We started our tour at around 9:00 in the morning. I saw many different species of birds during the two hours we were kayaking. I brought my binoculars with me on the boat, so I could see birds from a distance.

The first type of bird I saw was a turkey vulture. They were circling high above the treetops, and I could tell they were not hawks because they had differently shaped wings. When I was paddling around I saw several tree swallows and barn swallows flying over the water. Two tree swallows were just a few feet away from my kayak, and they fed each other in the air. Another bird I saw while I was kayaking was the great blue heron. I saw a few of them standing on the coastline, and I saw others flying right above my head.

My favorite bird I saw was a green heron, which I saw walking on a log floating in the water. I never saw this bird before, and I was glad I got a chance to see it. Another type of bird I saw was a group of cedar waxwings, which were perched on some branches

near the coastline. While I was kayaking, I moved under a bridge and I was surprised to see several nests inside holes made by swallows. I got to see many different species of birds at the Twin Lakes. The bird I liked most was the green heron. I was really glad I had the chance to bird while kayaking.



Afternoon:Nest Boxes by *Jacob Stinnett*

After a delicious lunch, Darlene took us around to the different nest boxes she had set up around the TAASC property. The first one we visited was a tree swallow nest box. It had five fledglings, which were about a week and a half old. They were the cutest things! Their feathers were just starting to emerge from the shafts and they still had a little bit of their down feathers mixed in with the new feathers. As Darlene picked up the first one, it pooped on her, leaving a fecal sac. The feces of the bird are inside a protective membrane so that the parents can remove the feces from the nest without making a mess. Most people got to hold one of the fledglings, and everyone took pictures of those cute, little things.

The other nest box we stopped at was a purple martin house. In one of the gourds hanging from the house, we found newborn chicks, only a few days old. These could not open their eyes and they were completely pink because their down had not even grown in yet. We found another gourd that had more of the newborn chicks and a couple of the apartments in the house had eggs. It was a very cool experience to see and hold these newborn chicks and the fledglings.



Afternoon: Mussel Research Tour *by Kat Seeley*

Following the banding, the members made a brief peregrination down the road to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium Freshwater Mussel Research Facility where we were greeted by Tom and Trisha. Each spoke of how their work pertains to the two main functions of the lab: 1) mitigation projects, which aim to restore destroyed mussel habitat; and 2) host-identification, a crucial step in species recovery. The two marine biologists also outlined mussel recovery and basic biology.

Freshwater mussels are actually bivalves, and are only loosely related to their marine counterparts. Bivalves are parasites. The mature mussel will clamp onto a fish and release the tens of thousands of its offspring, known as glochidium, into the fish's gills. The glochidium will live in the gills until they mature to the point of being juveniles, which can take a few days to a month depending on the species. When they do reach adolescence, the bivalves drop off from the fish. Each species of freshwater mussel has a specific host species of fish. For this reason, host-identification plays an important role in mussel conservation.

While they have existed since the Triassic period, approximately two dozen North American freshwater mussel species have gone extinct in the last one to two hundred years. Species native to Ohio have also decreased over the years. Of these, 22 remain common, such as the Wabash Pigtoe and Fat Mucket; 25 are endangered, like the Monkeyface and White Catspaw; 14 are extirpated, such as the colorfully named orange-foot pimpleback and ellipse; and six, including the Cincinnati Riffleshell and Scioto Pigtoe, are extinct. Habitat destruction and, more recently with the introduction of zebra and quaga mussels to the Lake Erie and Ohio River watersheds, invasive species are the two leading causes of bivalve decline.

The facility biologists have had, in terms of providing a healthy diet, the most success with muck dredged up from the bottom of the Scioto River. This simply delicious dirt is supplemented with a scrumptious stream of the microalgae *Nannochloropsis salina*. Bivalves can live to be two hundred years old, although most have life spans of ten to forty years.

In addition to the remarkable bivalve and host-fish species being nurtured in the facility, the club also had the opportunity to observe a hellbender. Hellbenders are one of the largest salamander species in the world—growing to over two feet in length—and may also serve as host species for freshwater mussels. The particular hellbender we admired had previously proved to not be a viable host for any of the bivalves at the facility and is due to be released into the wild.

The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium Freshwater Mussel Research Facility is one of less than a dozen in North America, and is the only one to be operated by a zoo. The many aquariums and mussel beds of the facility are housed within the former dance hall of the Jefferey Scioto Country Club.

Freshwater mussels are noted for their delicate constitution which makes them reliable environmental indicators. To observe the HQ of one of the few major players in bivalve conservation was indeed a privilege not lightly given to mortal men or teens.

Species list compiled by Nathan Martineau.

List of species seen:

Canada Goose	Bank Swallow
Mallard	Barn Swallow
Pied-billed Grebe	Carolina Chickadee
Great Blue Heron	Tufted Titmouse
Great Egret	White-breasted Nuthatch
Green Heron	Carolina Wren
Turkey Vulture	House Wren
Osprey	Blue-grey Gnatcatcher
Northern Harrier	Eastern Bluebird
Red Shouldered Hawk	American Robin
Red-tailed Hawk	Gray Catbird
Killdeer	Northern Mockingbird
Ring-billed Gull	European Starling
Rock Pigeon	Cedar Waxwing
Mourning Dove	Yellow Warbler
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Yellow-throated Warbler
Chimney Swift	American Redstart
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Prothonotary Warbler
Belted Kingfisher	Common Yellowthroat
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Scarlet Tanager
Northern Flicker	Eastern Towhee
Downy Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Eastern Wood Pewee	Field Sparrow
Least Flycatcher	Northern Cardinal
Eastern Phoebe	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Great Crested Flycatcher	Indigo Bunting
Eastern Kingbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Yellow-throated Vireo	Common Grackle
Warbling Vireo	Brown-headed Cowbird
Red-eyed Vireo	Orchard Oriole
Blue Jay	Baltimore Oriole
American Crow	House Finch
Purple Martin	American Goldfinch
Tree Swallow	House Sparrow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	

