

The Chagrin River is an “Important Bird Area”

In North America more than 1 in 4 birds have disappeared from the landscape since 1970. That is more than 1 in 4 Birds in Last 50 Years. Many birds we still consider common, ranging from Baltimore Orioles to Dark-eyed Juncos to Barn Swallows, are actually posting heavy population losses over time. Habitat loss stems from complex environmental factors including pesticide use that causes insect declines, climate changes altering winter habitats, and development that destroys old-growth forests of diverse tree structure including multi-layered canopies and canopy gaps.

Understanding the Chagrin River Corridor “IBA”, or Important Bird Area, starts with the website for Chagrin River Watershed Partners (<http://www.crowp.org/>). They identify the three main drainages that make up the watershed: The Upper Main Branch, The Aurora Branch, The East Branch. Seventy-one (71) miles of these streams are designated State Scenic River.

The objective of this identification is to improve bird habitat throughout the entire IBA area, thus improving species diversity and numbers. The IBA Project will be ongoing and will evolve as the years continue. A project of this magnitude includes working with target groups who can have a direct effect on improving bird habitat including the park districts, Holden Arboretum, and other public entities. It also involves private individuals who have more than 10 acres of woodland and a conservationist inclination.

Chagrin River Watershed Partners and the Audubon Society utilize an online data collection site, from Cornell University, called “eBird” (www.eBird.org). “eBird” identifies 49 “Hotspots” within the watershed which have been well identified the last several years by some excellent birders. Current eBird entries and historical accounts identify 280 species. Underbirded areas lacking eBird data are private lands adjacent to the Chagrin River and its branches. The big gaps include properties on the east side of the river between North Chagrin Reservation and South Chagrin Reservation in Gates Mills, Hunting Valley and Moreland Hills. So, we have some homework to do!

Understanding the native habitats in Gates Mills, and how to protect endangered species in our area will ensure a balanced ecosystem in our woodlands and along the river. We can assist in this data collection effort in Gates Mills, by entering information at <https://ebird.org/home>.