



# THE PLAIN DEALER

**AERIAL VIEW**

## **Birders get great views of gulls along Lake Erie shore**

Thursday, January 17, 2008

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The joy of birding is as much about the birders as it is about the birds.

After all, how much fun would we have scanning the multitudes of gulls on Cleveland's lakefront if we were birding in solitude?

Fortunately, there was no reason to fret about flying solo last weekend, as dozens of birders gathered to enjoy the winter spectacle that has blessed Northeast Ohio at Gordon State Park.

The birders' challenge was to pick out the various exceptional gull species hidden among the thousands of common gulls that came from across the Great Lakes region to gorge on the banquet of fish available along this stretch of Lake Erie shoreline.

And just to make the identification process a little more interesting, about every five minutes the gulls inexplicably arose en masse from the water, taking to the air in enormous shape-shifting clouds. They flew around in a swirl for a while as if engaged in a huge game of musical chairs, before settling down again.

Birders then had about five minutes to find the newly arrived gulls and to figure out where the target gulls had landed before the routine was repeated.

The task was made easier by all of the eyes focused on the panorama, each pair intent on a common purpose: to sift through the proliferation of herring, ring-billed and great black-backed gulls of varying ages and plumages for the rarer and more desirable species that dotted the flocks, such as Iceland, glaucous, Thayer's, and lesser black-backed gulls.

On Sunday, about 60 birders congregated for a joint field trip of the Ohio Young Birders Club and the Kirtland Bird Club. Leading the group were three of the sharpest birders in the state: Jerry Talkington, John Pogacnik and Larry Rosche.

Such a turnout was testament to the popularity of birding in Northeast Ohio, especially the increased interest among teens.

Of course, it helped that the outing was held in almost ideal conditions, with good light, comfortable temperatures and hardly a puff of wind, which made the Lake Erie surface turn to glass.

The birders who stuck around past noon were rewarded with a flyby treat of seven great egrets -- the first January sighting on record in the Cleveland region.

The day before was a little colder and windier, but the birding was better. Local tour leaders Jen Brumfield and Gabe Leidy brought a dozen birders to team up with scattered groups assembled along the shore. The target birds were closer to shore and more numerous, with Brumfield and Leidy reporting about 20 lesser black-backed gulls, a good number of glaucous and Iceland gulls, as well as a Thayer's gull.

The magical show won't last forever, so put on your long johns, break out your spotting scopes and enjoy the birds and the camaraderie before it ends.

### Sightings

John Pogacnik's Perry Township property produced another spectacular sighting last week, as one, and possibly as many as three Bohemian waxwings spent a few minutes in the bushes along the cliff above the lake. He also spotted a Northern goshawk.

Jeff Wert found a Northern shrike at the Bath Nature Preserve, Dwight Chasar spotted and photographed a shrike near the Jaite trailhead of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and Rita Schneider reported a shrike in the park at the Ira Road beaver pond.

Birding Lorain County over the weekend, Douglas Vogus spotted flocks of horned larks and a Northern harrier, three long-eared owls at the Caley Reservation, and five snow geese at the Wellington Reservoir.

Pogacnik found a cackling goose in a wetland in Leroy Township, Lake County. When Suzanne Wagner went there the following day, the cackling goose was gone, but she found a greater white-fronted goose.

Common redpolls continue to frequent feeders, delighting birders Susan Steinhouse in Moreland Hills, Lynda Bibler and Jerry Fitch in Avon, Laura Keene at the Carlisle Reservation in Lorain County, Sally Isacco in Chardon, Jeremiah Roth in Kent, Kathleen Beard in Chagrin Falls, and Pogacnik in Lake County.

Ray Hannikman spotted a hermit thrush at Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor.

An American bittern is still being seen at Sheldon's Marsh in Erie County, Sheryl Young reported.

Marge Stearns is enjoying the Eastern bluebirds visiting her feeders in Bainbridge Township.

Pine siskins are frequenting the feeders at Wolf Creek Park in Medina County, Dave Kersten and Beth McGuire reported.

Turkey vultures cruised over Inga Schmidt's fields in Geauga County.

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