



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Ohio Ornithological Society takes 120 birders to the Wilds - Aerial View

Thursday, January 24, 2008

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Plain Dealer Reporter

A couple of months ago, the Ohio Ornithological Society announced a winter field trip to the Wilds, a 10,000-acre tract of reclaimed strip mining country near Cambridge that, over the past 20 years or so, has been healed by nature and evolved into a magnet for migratory birds.

Last year, for a similar event, the society underestimated the interest and limited attendance to about 18 birders.

This year, on a frigid and windy Saturday, 120 birders arrived at this spectacular wildlife preserve in central Ohio, where they were treated to some of the best winter sightings found anywhere in the Midwest.

Without question, the stars of the show were the raptors. And the king of the raptors - the golden eagle - topped the marquee.

Nowhere east of the Great Plains is there a more reliable place to see a golden eagle. These most dominant of all North American birds of prey have been attracted to the Wilds by its resemblance to their native hunting grounds, and for its abundance of rodents on which they feed.

Anyone who couldn't find the eagle in the morning received a reprieve after lunch. While Wilds naturalist Al Parker finished a slide presentation on raptors at the dining hall, almost as if on cue a golden eagle soared past the observation deck. The young bird flashed the well-defined white patches on its underwings and tail, bringing the program to a halt as birders rushed to the picture windows for a bird's-eye view.

"As far as I could tell, every person and group saw it, and most got good looks," said society President Jim McCormac in his trip report posted on the Ohio Birds Web site.

McCormac pronounced this a less-than-bumper year for raptors at the Wilds, which he blamed on a shortage of meadow voles. But you could have fooled me, as rough-legged hawks and Northern harriers seemed to appear around every twist in the road and over every hillside.

The rough-leggeds provided especially fine viewing, riding the gusty winds and occasionally hovering motionless over a vole's hole, prepared to dive the moment a mouse appeared.

Rough-leggeds are only here in the winter, spending summers nesting in the Arctic. We spotted more than a dozen of these long-winged raptors at the Wilds, in a variety of plumages and shades of dark and light morphs. They occasionally landed on the grass and parried with passing harriers.

At dusk, the second act began, with appearances by several short-eared owls, North Country hunters that also winter over at the Wilds.

The Wilds is one of the best places in the state to see trumpeter swans, which are expected to stick around

until the ponds freeze. Horned larks flock along the gravel roads, and Eastern meadowlarks winter over there.

So if a golden eagle is on your target list for 2008, and you expected to have to travel to Colorado to see one, take heart. Just climb in your car, drive about two hours south on I-77, and follow the signs to the Wilds. Search for a huge, dark bird and enjoy the show.

Sightings

Jeff Wert spotted a short-eared owl hunting over a short-grass field at the corner of State and Fixler roads in Wadsworth.

A barred owl perched in a tree behind Diane Rutkoski's house in Cleveland long enough for her to snap a series of photographs.

The common redpoll sightings tapered off last week, but the boreal finches still were seen by Scott Wright in North Olmsted, Sally Isacco in Chardon, Leslie Basalla at the North Chagrin Nature Center and John Pogacnik in Perry Township, Lake County.

A flock of 21 field sparrows was a nice surprise for Gabe Leidy at the Jaite trailhead in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Tree, swamp and song sparrows also made appearances, and a golden-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush and barred owl were at the Horseshoe Pond site.

The fabulous gull display continued at the East 72nd Street location of Gordon State Park in Cleveland, where Greg Cudworth and Suzanne Wagner reported good numbers of all three white-winged gulls, plus a handful of lesser black-backed gulls among the thousands of more common gulls.

Pogacnik reported a return appearance by a white-winged crossbill at his backyard feeders on Sunday.

Haans Petruschke had a few hoary redpolls at his feeders outside the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland over the weekend and posted several photographs on his Web site: <http://fromgildersleeve.blogspot.com>.

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