



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Ottawa County has earned its wings

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As much enjoyment as we find in watching birds, sharing the sightings with friendly and talented people makes it even better.

I'm reminded of this whenever I go birding with members of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, an outstanding group of birders dedicated to the research, education, conservation and promotion of birds in Ohio.

From its humble beginnings 18 years ago in Mark and Julie Shieldcastle's living room, the Black Swamp group has grown into one of the finest birding clubs in the country. It's headquartered at the entrance to the Crane Creek and Magee Marsh state parks in Ottawa County.

The Black Swamp group had its 15th annual banquet Saturday in Columbus, featuring Miyoko Chu, author of "Songbird Journeys; Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds," as keynote speaker.

The following morning, we embarked on a couple of field trips that succeeded in getting us all excited for the arrival of spring.

Leading the walks were four of the founding members of the Ohio Young Birders Club, a Black Swamp partner mentored by Ohio's first couple of birding, Kenn and Kim Kaufman. The club boasts 180 members and is the model for start-ups in Florida, Illinois and New York.

Green Lawn Cemetery is probably Columbus' favorite birding destination. Just south of downtown, the 160-year-old graveyard has attracted many rarities through the years and has remained up-to-form this year.

Shortly after our caravan entered the gates, we spooked a merlin. The small falcon circled for a while, which stirred up a sharp-shinned hawk. Both raptors soon disappeared.

Not to worry. A network of feeders near the pond was busy with woodland songbirds and woodpeckers.

A pine warbler that has been reliable through the winter did not let us down. Nor did an array of other crowd-pleasers, including pine siskin, yellow-bellied sapsucker, red-breasted nuthatch and ruby-crowned kinglet.

White-throated, song and tree sparrows, red-bellied, downy and hairy woodpeckers, American goldfinch and white-breasted nuthatch rounded out the feeder birds. A flyby turkey vulture must have been on its way to Hinckley.

The Black Swamp crowd also visited a riparian hot spot on the Scioto River known as the Whittier Peninsula. Jerry Tinianow, executive director of Audubon Ohio, is justifiably proud of this urban birding oasis to be known as the Scioto Audubon Metro Park.

"There's no project anything like it in the United States," Tinianow said. "The birding is fantastic, and it's within a mile of the state capitol."

From a newly constructed observation platform, we scanned the river for waterfowl, spotting a surf scoter, common goldeneye, hooded mergansers, bufflehead, black ducks and lesser scaup.

Just as we prepared to leave, a killdeer flew overhead, calling its familiar high-pitched "dee-dee-dee." Other killdeer reports from northern Ohio poured in all day.

"Along with the movement of ducks, crows, blackbirds, etc., this is the vanguard of the migration that will make this area so exciting for the next three months," Kenn Kaufman wrote in a post to the Ohio Birds Web site.

To learn more about the Black Swamp Bird Observatory and the Ohio Young Birders Club, go to www.bsbobird.org and www.ohioyoungbirders.org.

Sightings

Gabe Leidy found a Northern shrike at the Jaite trail site in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. At Gordon State Park's East 72nd Street site, he counted hundreds of canvasback, redhead, scaup and common goldeneye ducks.

A shrike was on Whitney Road near the Caley Reservation of the Lorain County Metro Parks, Ben Fambrough reported.

Other Cuyahoga Valley National Park birds included yellow-bellied sapsucker, golden-crowned kinglet, pileated woodpecker and a large flock of Eastern bluebirds, Patrick Coy reported.

A Northern mockingbird is coming to Barbara Weisman's feeder in Cleveland Heights.

Carolina wrens are visiting Chris Griggs' suet and water in Brunswick, and bluebirds are feeding on suet offered by Nelson and Jean Sanger of Moreland Hills.

Jerry Lindak has a tip for attracting American robins in winter: raisins. A whistle alerts the robins that it's feeding time, and they arrive by the dozens, Lindak reports.

We received a report from Jeff Wert of Granger Township in Medina County that made us envious. He was riding a ski lift in Colorado with his wife, Missy, and their friends Tim and Mindy Remington, when he called to pass along the sighting of a golden eagle.

In Geauga County, the feeders at Big Creek Park were busy with pine siskins and common redpolls, Sally Isacco and Linda Gilbert reported. Hayes Road was alive with rough-legged hawks, short-eared owls, snow buntings and an immature bald eagle that harassed the owls, Isacco said.

Redpolls were also at the Lorain County Metro Parks Carlisle Reservation, reported Fambrough and Andrea Haslage of Columbus.

Other Lorain County sightings included rough-legged hawks, Northern harrier, Lapland longspur and snow bunting, Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein reported.

Tracey Knierim spotted a green heron near LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County.

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