



THE PLAIN DEALER

With seasonal changes come new migratory birds - Aerial View

Thursday, April 24, 2008

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Spring unfolds in ebbs and flows in Northeast Ohio, and nature moves right along with it.

One day, it's 40 degrees, the woodland floors are bare, and the trees and understory are alive with sapsuckers, creepers, white-throated sparrows and winter wrens.

The next week, it's 70 degrees, the bloodroot, spicebush and trout lilies are in bloom, and the songs of warblers, gnatcatchers, chipping sparrows and house wrens fill the air.

We witnessed much of this seasonal transformation over the past week.

A migratory wave that blessed us with a visit from an Audubon's warbler last week, plus inspiring appearances by ruby-crowned kinglets and pine and yellow-rumped warblers, gradually gave way to a new wave of birds over the weekend.

A remarkable 60-plus birders turned out for a walk on Saturday at the Station Road Bridge Trailhead of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and a chance to bird-watch beside leaders Dwight and Ann Chasar and some of the sharpest eyes in the area.

They were treated to stunning views of the species of the day, yellow-throated warblers. They appear to be thriving in the sycamores that line the Cuyahoga River near Brecksville.

The blue-gray gnatcatchers were there, too. Those with good ears could hear their thin, high-pitched calls. A solitary sandpiper was working the shore of the pond where a rare Eurasian teal remained to thrill the crowd.

Bald eagles were visible at the nest in the Pinery Narrows swamp, although the chick remained hidden from view while we were there. It's the second consecutive year of success for the eagles - the first to nest in Cuyahoga County in 70 years.

Birding buddy Jeff Wert recognized a raptor movement under way and spotted broad-winged, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks high in the clear blue sky.

But the best raptors could be found farther east in Morgan Township, Ashtabula County, where Larry Rosche led a wine-tasting and birding walk for 40 folks at a Grand River site owned by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. They were treated to views of dozens of broad-winged hawks, plus a bonus bird: a golden eagle!

I headed east on Sunday, where the rain failed to dampen the birding opportunities. Brown thrashers and Eastern towhees were singing at the Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve in Mentor. Several birders caught sight of a first-of-the-year grasshopper sparrow, which was skulking in the dune grass. Earlier in the week, a black-throated green warbler was in the cottonwoods by the parking lot.

Other signs of spring were emerging at nearby Veterans Park, where the cries of spring peepers have been replaced by the trills of American toads and where skunk cabbage and May apples are bursting from the soil. The first green heron of the spring sailed by, a male rusty blackbird was desperately singing for a mate, and a spotted sandpiper bobbed its tail as it patrolled an island in the pond.

The Audubon's warbler that provided such excitement the week before has moved on - it is hoped to the Western states, where it belongs. Soon the yellow-rumped warblers, dark-eyed juncoes and kinglets will depart, to be replaced by the full force of the May songbird migration.

Which is a time that every birder lives for.

Sightings

At the West Creek Reservation in Parma, Gabe Leidy found a worm-eating warbler, plus Louisiana waterthrush, blue-headed vireo, house and winter wrens and good numbers of broad-winged hawks.

Henry Burton reported a probable glossy ibis at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville.

Birders on a walk at the Firestone Metro Park in Akron spotted yellow-throated, pine and yellow-rumped warblers, ruby-crowned kinglets and rusty blackbirds, Janet Wertz said.

Winter wrens were singing in Stebbins Gulch in Chardon Township, Brian Parsons reported.

Yellow-throated warblers were in the trees along the Vermilion River in Lorain County, Keith Tarvin said.

John Pogacnik's house in Perry Township was exceptionally busy with sightings of broad-winged, sharp-shinned and red-shouldered hawks, merlin, osprey, chimney swift, sandhill crane, evening grosbeak, pine siskin, purple finch, pine warbler, Louisiana waterthrush and American pipit.

At the Happy Days Visitor Center in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Brad Wilkinson found Louisiana waterthrush and black-throated green warblers. At the nearby Deep Lock Quarry Metro Park in Peninsula, he spotted yellow-throated warbler and blue-headed vireo.

Louisiana waterthrush were singing along the Daffodil Trailhead in Furnace Run Metro Park in Richfield, Karen Gray said.

Paula Lozano spotted a short-eared owl at Burke Lakefront Airport.

Bob Faber found a bobolink and many Wilson's snipe at the Coliseum grasslands of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

A whippoorwill surprised Lou Gardella at the Calvary Cemetery in Garfield Heights.

Pat Gessler spotted an American bittern in her neighbor's back yard in Avon Lake.

Roger Beuck discovered a great horned owl nest with a chick at Chagrin River Park in Willoughby.

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