



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

No choosing sides in birding spots

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From what I can tell, not many Northeast Ohio birders buy into the East vs. West rivalry. Both sides of the Cuyahoga River hold some of the state's most attractive birding destinations, and I visited two of my favorites last weekend - one per side, each a convenient half-hour drive from my Lakewood home.

Saturday at sunrise, the weather forecasters had told me to expect clear skies and warm air. Instead, I ran into a cool, misty drizzle as I drove toward the Sandy Ridge Reservation, one of the Lorain County Metro Parks in North Ridgeville.

Although my hands required periodic warming, the birds appeared comfortable and active.

As I strolled through the half-mile stretch of woodlands that separates the nature center from the ponds, I was struck by the near-idyllic birding conditions. The air was perfectly still, and the troops of power-walkers must have been scared away by the weather, allowing me the chance to detect every movement and to pick up even the slightest chirps.

All around, newly arrived yellow-rumped and palm warblers flitted and dashed, gleaning insects from shrubs and trees with freshly sprouting leaves. The palms were of the yellow Eastern race, madly pumping their tails and communicating with chips and snippets of songs. Even the yellow-rumps, our most common spring migrant and one of the least colorful, appeared bright in the gloom of the forest.

A single yellow warbler and several ruby-crowned kinglets and blue-gray gnatcatchers completed the songbird menu.

At the ponds, naturalists appear to have managed the water levels for improved shorebird habitat, and the early arrivals were enjoying the mud. Solitary and spotted sandpipers and four lesser yellowlegs probed for bugs and crustaceans along the shoreline. Blue-winged and green-winged teal dabbled in the shallows, and sora rails whinnied as they stalked through the grass.

What a great place for beginners and elderly birders, I thought, with its flat trails and easy viewing access to bald eagles, sandhill cranes, swamp sparrows and wood ducks, all of which nest here. A pair of Caspian terns occupied a stone in the middle of the water. Flocks of ruddy ducks and a few Northern shoveler and gadwall stragglers remained. At least two dozen great egrets busily snagged fish and frogs, putting on a marvelous show.

The predicted warm, sunny weather arrived Sunday in time for my visit to Headlands Beach State Nature Preserve in Mentor, and a fresh wave of songbirds arrived with it.

At least three prairie warblers were there, including a vibrant male proudly singing "zee, zee, zee" up the scale. Our first Nashville warbler and white-eyed and warbling vireos of the spring were welcome sights.

Blue-gray gnatcatchers seemed to be everywhere. Brown thrashers, wood thrushes and white-throated sparrows made a convoluted trio of singers, and winter wrens and kinglets moved silently through the

understory. Flocks of Eastern bluebirds arrived in the company of palm warblers, an odd species couple.

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks passed overhead, terrorizing the other birds. Eastern towhees, swamp and chipping sparrows, and a black-throated green warbler seem to do their best to avoid detection. Earlier, the Headlands crew found an American bittern in the reeds and a whippoorwill roosting on a low branch - amazing discoveries considering both species' camouflage.

To find the best route to reach Sandy Ridge and Headlands Beach, check out the new birding page at cleveland.com/neobirding.

Sightings

Jerry Talkington and Ray Hannikman witnessed a phenomenon at Headlands Beach last week, counting 12 Northern harriers over a two-day period. They also saw a Virginia rail.

Birding the West Creek Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks, Gabe Leidy found hooded, Northern waterthrush, ovenbird, palm and common yellowthroat warblers, a wood thrush and a great horned owl.

Yellow-headed blackbirds were seen and photographed in a Parma back yard and at the Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks.

Young birders Ethan Kistler and Phil Chaon had an exciting day at Metzger Marsh in Ottawa County, spotting a piping plover, American avocet, ibis and willets.

A worm-eating warbler was the highlight of John and Ann Edwards' walk at Elmwood Park in Rocky River on Saturday. Also spotted there: Nashville, orange-crowned, blue-winged, and black-throated green warblers.

A rose-breasted grosbeak visited the Granger Township, Medina County, feeders of Jeff and Missy Wert.

Rusty blackbirds and a whippoorwill serenaded Chris Pierce at his North Olmsted home.

An early great crested flycatcher was a surprise for Kevin Metcalf at the Bradley Woods Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks. He also spotted a kettle of migrating broad-winged hawks knocked down by the rain over Chardon in Geauga County.

The Lake County lakefront was alive with new arrivals, John Pogacnik reported, with whippoorwill, wood thrush, palm, worm-eating, Nashville, yellow, and ovenbird warblers, rose-breasted grosbeak and red-necked grebe.

Fans of Southwest and Buckeye, the peregrine falcons that nest on the 12th floor of the Terminal Tower in downtown Cleveland, can follow the progress of their chicks via images broadcast online from three cameras, reports Harvey Webster, director of wildlife resources at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Two eggs have hatched; the status of a third is unknown. Check it out at www.falconcam-cmnh.org

Ron Slabe reports some unfortunate experiences with his double shepherd's hook bird feeder. In the past year, he has rescued a sparrow that became snagged between the hooks, but a sparrow and a goldfinch died. He suggests wrapping duct tape around the hooks to cover the dangerous gap.

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