



THE PLAIN DEALER

Wildlife Division to run Crane Creek, Magee Marsh -- Aerial View

Thursday, May 15, 2008

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The biggest birding news of the week received minimal fanfare outside of a loose-knit club of Ohio's most passionate birders.

And it didn't involve the discovery of a rare species or a sudden shift in the spring migration.

The news involved the switch in stewardship over Ohio's most treasured migratory stop and favorite birding destination: Crane Creek State Park in Ottawa County.

As the name implied, Crane Creek and its accompanying Magee Marsh Wildlife Area had been run by the state Division of Parks for decades. It thrived as a refuge for birds in spite of its Parks designation, with its groomed swimming beach, pit toilets and acres of parking lots.

Now all of that is expected to change with the move by the state Division of Wildlife to assume control over the park, the marsh and its famed boardwalk.

Magee Marsh naturalist Mary Warren said the changeover will bring a return of natural habitat to the beach and a portion of the parking lot. Swimmers and picnickers will be directed to beachfront parks to the west and east. The pit toilets will be removed, and replaced by portable units.

Columbus birder Bill Whan, in a post to the Ohio Birds Web site, called for the parking lots to be bulldozed and the land allowed to return to its original wooded beach ridge state, which would double the size of the park.

"Seldom do Ohioans have an opportunity to actually increase such an endangered habitat," Whan wrote. "I hope the Division of Wildlife will opt for wildlife -- especially birds -- rather than humans as they manage this property."

On the busiest days, birders would park in a satellite lot and be bused to the boardwalk on a tram such as is done at Point Pelee National Park in Ontario, Canada, and at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Texas.

Under the new regime, enlightened birders such as Jim McCormac, an avian specialist with the Division of Wildlife, now will have a say in decisions that have an impact on this vital state-owned birding habitat.

In the eyes of a bird from the air, Crane Creek and Magee Marsh appear as a lush oasis amid a sea of plowed farmland desert while on its annual journey to its Canadian nesting ground.

With the change in ownership, that oasis should become greener and more inviting for birds and birders alike.

Sightings

A tip of the birding hat to naturalist Tim Fairweather and the 20 or so birders who accompanied my son Bret and me on a walk through the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville on Sunday. Under less-than-ideal conditions, we managed to pick up more than a dozen warblers, a nice mix of shorebirds, four sora rails, the first marsh wren of the year, and an osprey.

The bird of the week had to be the blue grosbeak that hung around for three days at the feeders at The West Woods Nature Center in Russell Township, Geauga County. Many birders were able to enjoy this rarity and take photographs, but it was gone by Saturday when a crowd of chasers arrived.

Young birders Ethan Kistler and Aaron Boone discovered Ohio's first nesting common ravens in more than 100 years. They found the nest at an old strip mine in Jefferson County, where the birds had carved out a nesting site on a ledge and crammed it with sticks.

Hummingbirds and bobolinks have returned to Lynn Josefsen's property in Medina.

At the West Creek Reservation in Parma, Gabe Leidy spotted prairie, orange-crowned, yellow-throated, and bay-breasted warblers, and a sedge wren.

The Headlands Crew flushed a LeConte's sparrow on the dunes and found a snowy egret at Veterans Park in Mentor, Ray Hannikman reported.

Dane Adams found and photographed a red-necked phalarope in a wetland pool located on his farm in Wellington. Also there this spring: American pipit, American bittern and Wilson's snipe.

Glenn Obergefell photographed rose-breasted grosbeaks and Lincoln's sparrows visiting his feeders in Concord Township.

Also in Geauga County, Lyn Miller has attracted indigo buntings, wood thrush, nesting house wrens, rose-breasted grosbeaks, hummingbirds and red-breasted nuthatches to her Auburn Township property.

Forty-five birders counted 130 species at the spring survey of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park on Saturday, Dwight Chasar reported. Birds of note included: sedge wren, worm-eating warbler, flyover whimbrels, new high counts for Virginia rail and yellow-throated vireo, and a hybrid Brewster's warbler at Horseshoe Pond.

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