



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Humans don't faze feathered visitors

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I attended the social event of the year last weekend at Crane Creek State Park and the Magee Marsh boardwalk in Ottawa County.

In between schmoozing with some of my favorite people, straining to hear the subtle notes of songbirds above the din of mindless chatter, and weaving through hordes of folks with field guides in hand and looks of shock and bewilderment on their faces, I actually enjoyed some spectacular birding.

Because, despite the carnival that Crane Creek and Magee Marsh have become during weekends in May, the multitudes of birds that stop here on their journey north appear unaffected by the heavy human traffic. And the growing popularity of bird-watching is a good thing, after all.

It's just that birding, by its nature, is a hobby best appreciated in solitude by small groups of close friends.

Not to get too nostalgic, but I miss crawling out of bed in the dark of predawn and cruising up to Crane Creek in the back seat of Woody Stover's giant '67 Chrysler. Crowds were unimaginable at Crane Creek in the 1970s. So were boardwalks, for that matter.

I still pity the poor worm-eating warbler we had spotted on one trip. After we had stomped through the underbrush for a better view, we surrounded the frightened rarity before we wised up and left it alone.

I can only imagine the devastation at the park without a boardwalk today.

Enough about 30 years ago. Last week, the trees and bushes along the birding trail were dripping with brightly colored migrants at close range.

For starters, there were more mourning, Canada and Northern parula warblers in one location than I have ever seen.

Magnolia and chestnut-sided warblers dominated the woods. There were plenty of bay-breasted, black-throated greens and blues, Nashville, black-and-white, Blackburnian, Cape May, blackpoll, palm, Wilson's, American redstart, common yellowthroat, yellow and yellow-rumped warblers to enjoy.

Tennessee, orange-crowned and cerulean warblers also made cameo appearances.

Patient observers of leaf litter and marsh edges were rewarded with sightings of ovenbirds and Northern waterthrush; gray-cheeked, veery and Swainson's thrush; American woodcocks; Lincoln's sparrows; and sora rails.

The whistled songs of Baltimore orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, scarlet tanagers and warbling vireos echoed through the woods.

An olive-sided flycatcher sighting caused a pileup on the boardwalk.

Those with the urge to break away from the crowds to the surrounding areas were treated to a flooded farm field across the highway teeming with more than 40 American golden plovers, flocks of dunlin, plus yellowlegs and semipalmated plover.

At Metzger Marsh, a short drive to the west, seven glossy ibis, a black tern and several more golden plovers awaited.

For anyone planning to make the 1½-hour drive to Ottawa County in the coming weeks, remember this: Expect great birding, but lots of company.

Sightings

Reports of an invasion of rose-breasted grosbeaks continued to pour in from across Northeast Ohio. At least five grosbeaks were in a single tree on Edgewater Drive in Lakewood last week, and several continued to visit the feeders at my house. Bill Whan, editor of the Ohio Cardinal, offered a theory for the grosbeak influx in a post to Ohio Birds last week. He said the Easter freeze may have hit the grosbeaks' natural foods by damaging leaf buds and the insects that feed on them. In a walking survey of Columbus trees, Whan found the results chilling. "So keep those feeders filled if you like grosbeaks!" he advised.

Highlights of birding with my son Bret at Lakewood Park included: Cape May, chestnut-sided, black-throated green, Nashville, magnolia, palm, black-and-white, Northern parula, ovenbird, Canada, Blackburnian, Northern waterthrush and bay-breasted warblers; blue-headed vireo; bobolink; black-billed cuckoo; Eastern bluebird; clay-colored and Savannah sparrows; scarlet tanager; and wood and Swainson's thrush.

The star of the spring census at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park on Saturday was a Sutton's warbler - a hybrid of Northern parula and yellow-throated warblers - found near the Station Road Bridge trailhead. Also spotted: Canada, blackpoll and bay-breasted warblers; osprey; and yellow-billed cuckoo.

Jeff Wert witnessed three Louisiana waterthrushes squabbling over nesting turf at the Hinckley Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks.

A pair of peregrine falcons nesting in a dormant tower at the Mittal Steel complex in Cleveland hatched three chicks last week. A camera in the nest captured the event.

A yellow-crowned night-heron flushed from a tree at John Pogacnik's yard in Perry Township, Lake County. He also had orchard and Baltimore orioles, pine siskin, purple finch, grosbeaks, red-headed woodpecker and indigo bunting at his feeders.

Paula Lozano spotted black-billed cuckoo, great horned owl, blue-headed vireo, and veery and gray-cheeked thrush at Elmwood Park in Rocky River.

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