



THE PLAIN DEALER

From Sandy Ridge to the Headlands, birding thrived over the 3-day weekend

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There's only one sure cure for the melancholy that accompanies the three-day Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial end of the spring migration:

Three days of intense birding.

While the rest of Northeast Ohio was golfing, biking or grilling meat on the barbecue, my bird-watching buddies and I were squeezing in as much birding as the weekend and the weather would allow.

Day One was the annual Ohio Young Birders Club outing to the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area and the surrounding environs of Ottawa County. The 40 or so kids probably won't realize for years how lucky they were to be led by the peerless Kenn Kaufman, author and field guide, and Robert Hershberger of Millersburg, one of the state's top birders.

In true bird-busting fashion, we tromped around for nearly 12 hours. There were the expected stunning opportunities to observe warblers, thrush and vireos up close along the boardwalk. But we went the extra mile, enjoying black terns at Metzger Marsh, plus sedge and marsh wrens and king and Virginia rails at the Mallard Club Marsh.

Day Two found us with another crowd of birders, this time at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville. Leading us were the always entertaining Larry Rosche, conservation specialist at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and Tim Fairweather, chief naturalist with the Lorain County Metro Parks.

We spent quality time on the trail with cavity-nesting prothonotary warblers and red-headed woodpeckers. But leave it to Rosche to nail an incoming least bittern, a rare and normally secretive bird that posed for nearly 10 minutes before stalking off in search of a more secluded spot.

A red-necked phalarope did a disappearing act after only one of our group - my son Bret - saw it. But plenty of other shorebirds and waders held our interest.

Day Three was predicted to be the best birding day of the weekend, based on the southerly breezes overnight. And the holiday met our expectations at Headlands Dunes State Preserve in Mentor, with a good variety of late-arriving migrants and several surprises.

After waiting out a thunderstorm, we headed to the beach, where the self-taught and sharp-eyed Jerry Talkington immediately noticed an oddball goose flying in a flock of Canadas westward along the Lake Erie shoreline.

"Look at that little guy!" Talkington called out.

A rare cackling goose, which should have been in the Arctic, was still hanging around Northeast Ohio.

The woodlands along the fisherman's trail were alive with blackpoll warblers, red-eyed vireos and cedar waxwings, with a smattering of Canada, Wilson's, American redstart, chestnut-sided, Tennessee, Nashville, Northern parula and yellow warblers.

A single mourning warbler appeared for about 10 seconds before diving into the understory. And a Philadelphia vireo popped in and out of view in a maple tree.

Shorebirds along the lakefront included ruddy turnstone, sanderling, dunlin and semipalmated plover.

The birding stayed lively, even as we lounged on our backyard patio in the afternoon. The air was filled with the buzzy calls of great crested flycatchers, the thin wheezing of blackpoll warblers, the monotonous songs of red-eyed vireos and the whistling of Baltimore orioles.

Sightings

Headlands was busy all week, with a piping plover on the beach and a Connecticut warbler in the foliage along the fisherman's trail sticking around for several days, Ray Hannikman reported. Other birds included two laughing gulls near the lighthouse and an olive-sided flycatcher at Mentor Lagoons.

Two olive-sided and three yellow-bellied flycatchers visited John Pogacnik's lakefront property in Perry Township. Other yardbirds were an evening grosbeak, Northern chat and Northern parula, blackpoll and mourning warblers. Over the lake, he counted large movements of brant and whimbrel and a single white-rumped sandpiper in a flock of dunlin.

Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein found a cerulean warbler at the Shaker Lake Nature Center. Bret McCarty had a cerulean singing on Edgewater Drive west of Lakewood Park.

Black terns delighted birders at Frohring Meadows in Bainbridge, Matt Valencic said. Inga Schmidt reported a flock of 39 whimbrels.

Black terns also were at the Sandy Ridge Reservation, per Tim Fairweather.

The Lorain Impoundment has been busy with shorebirds, Gabe Leidy reported, including Wilson's phalarope, white-rumped sandpiper, semipalmated plover and sandpiper, greater and lesser yellowlegs, spotted and least sandpiper, ruddy turnstone and dunlin.

At least one Henslow's sparrow has returned to the Coliseum grasslands in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Bryn Roberts reported. Also seen: lots of bobolinks, Eastern meadowlarks, Savannah sparrows, soras and a Northern harrier.

Gregory Bennett found a Ross's goose and common moorhen on the North side of Summit Lake in Akron.

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