



THE PLAIN DEALER

Birding safari to take reporter, son from Michigan to N. Dakota - Aerial View

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Plain Dealer Reporter

Pack up your suitcase, clean your binoculars, and don't forget the bug spray - we're going on a birding safari.

For the next two weeks, you're welcome to tag along with my son, Bret, and me as we hit the road in pursuit of dozens of the most exotic and elusive species in some of North America's most out-of-the-way places.

We will put some major miles on the rental car, bird-busting through Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Manitoba and North Dakota before heading home.

If my computer technology works - and that's a big IF - you will be able to share all of our sightings and adventures along the way. The plan is to file regular updates on my bird blog, and to post photographs of our best sightings, uploaded by my trusty sidekick.

You will be there as Bret and I tour the jack pine forests of Northern Michigan, the nesting grounds of the rarest of all North American songbirds, the Kirtland's warbler.

You will be alongside us - minus the mosquitoes and black flies - as we slosh through marshes in Minnesota and Manitoba in search of the rare and elusive yellow rail.

You will have to imagine the howls of the wolves in the predawn at Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba as we hunt for black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers, spruce grouse and Connecticut warblers. Moose, black bears, lynx and elk also traverse this phenomenal forest in the heart of the prairies, which we may be fortunate to spot while searching for great gray, Northern saw-whet and Northern hawk owls.

You can hike with us through waist-high grass, without having to worry about picking off the ticks afterward, as we seek the Big Three of prairie sparrows in North Dakota: Baird's LeConte's and Nelson's sharp-tailed. We will do our best to dodge the rattlesnakes and badgers while in pursuit of Sprague's pipit, sharp-tailed grouse and upland sandpiper. And we will see if we can hook up with some of the brightest young birders in the country who are meeting at the American Birding Association conference in Minot.

North Dakota is one of Julie Zickefoose's favorite birding states in the country.

The nature artist and writer from Marietta wrote an ode to the remote grassland state in a recent edition of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, which is published by her husband, Bill Thompson III.

"It's crammed seemingly past capacity with birds," Zickefoose wrote. "All hard to see elsewhere, all breeding. . . . There's nobody else around, so you can crawl along at 10 miles per hour, casting your glance across the landscape, and pull over in a heartbeat when a ferruginous hawk sails into view.

"Could a birder ask for anything more?"

So, beginning next week, check out the blog (cleveland.com/neobirding/) every couple of days to find out where we are and what we've seen there.

You may even be inspired to embark on a similar adventure with your favorite traveling buddies some day.

Sightings

Among several of Northeast Ohio's birding hot spots, Craig Caldwell found a mourning warbler at Headlands Dunes Nature Preserve in Mentor, a white-eyed vireo at the Oak Hill trailhead, and Henslow's sparrow at the Coliseum grasslands in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

At the Ledges picnic grounds in the national park, Jen Brumfield found dark-eyed junco, hermit thrush, and Kentucky, black-throated green, hooded, and chestnut-sided warblers.

Dark-eyed juncoes are nesting at the Brecksville and South Chagrin reservations of the Cleveland Metroparks, Bob Hinkle reported. Orchard orioles also are pairing up at South Chagrin, he said.

A junco appeared at the Canal Way Center of the Cleveland Metroparks in Cuyahoga Heights, Jo Ann Kubicki reported.

Robert Reynard found an olive-sided flycatcher at the West Creek Reservation in Parma.

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