



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## AERIAL VIEW

### Sightings abound in spots unfamiliar to many birders - Aerial View

Thursday, July 17, 2008

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All of us have our favorite birding spots.

For some of us, that place is convenient or close by, such as an inviting back yard or a neighborhood park, especially now that gasoline costs about \$4 a gallon.

For those of us who have difficulty getting around, ease of birding is essential. The location must have smooth paths on solid, flat ground such as the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, the Towpath through the Cuyahoga Valley National Park or the Bath Nature Preserve in Summit County.

For most of us, though, the choice comes down to the birds that may be found. Traditional migratory traps such as Headlands Beach State Park, Mentor Lagoons, Magee Marsh, Killdeer Plains, The Wilds and Conneaut Harbor are favored spots. For a list of Northeast Ohio's best locales, go to [cleveland.com/neobirding](http://cleveland.com/neobirding).

Beginning this week and for the next few months, I'll explore several little-known birding spots that have come onto my radar screen.

To kick off this occasional series, I joined Dwight and Ann Chasar and about 20 other birders on an early morning walk last weekend at Howe Meadow in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Few birders know the park as well as the Chasars, volunteers who organize the twice-a-year bird census surveys and lead birding tours in the park.

Most Northeast Ohio birders are familiar with the park's popular stops, such as the Coliseum grasslands, the Station Road Bridge Trailhead, the Ira Road beaver pond and the Ledges Trail.

But the Howe Meadow was new for most of us. And what an enjoyable introduction it was.

The main trail passes through a shaded canopy of towering black walnut trees reminiscent of the renowned "cathedral" in the Boy Scout Woods at High Island, Texas.

For more than a half-hour we leaned back, craned our necks and enjoyed dappled sunlit views of some of our most brightly plumaged woodland songbirds.

The birds included hard-to-see stunners such as the blue-winged warbler, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting and Baltimore oriole. Some of those birds were more often heard than seen, such as the red-eyed vireo, Eastern wood-pewee and blue-gray gnatcatcher.

The Chasars recognized a loud, persistent chip as the call of a hooded warbler, which flitted in and out of view in the thick understory, never lingering long enough for a satisfying look.

After emerging from the woods, we stopped beside a grapevine tangle and a grove of sumacs that were

alive with birds. They held a yellow warbler, orioles, a grosbeak and - surprise - a wood thrush that popped up, looked around for a few seconds and then disappeared into the shadows. Overhead, a ruby-throated hummingbird posed on a dead tree snag, catching the sun rays on its sparkling gorget whenever it turned its head.

In the meadow and at the mowed fields of the Hale Farm and Village, we encountered Eastern kingbird, chipping, song and field sparrows, Eastern towhee, cedar waxwing, Eastern phoebe, gray catbird, common yellowthroat and several Eastern bluebirds.

Bank swallows coursed across Indigo Lake and occasionally splashed down for an insect on the water.

An American goldfinch sitting on a nest was a rare and satisfying find.

#### Sightings

An amazing and unexpected bird at any time of year turned up in Melinda Burdette's Sheffield Lake back yard last week. On July 7, she noticed a bright bird splashing in her tiny backyard pond.

"I didn't know what it was," Burdette said. "I just knew it was beautiful, and I had never seen one before."

She grabbed her Peterson guide to Eastern birds, but it wasn't in the book. That's because the bird was a male Western tanager - the first seen in Northeast Ohio during the summer and the first ever for Lorain County, according to Larry Rosche's "Birds of the Cleveland Region." Burdette photographed the bright yellow bird with a stunning red head and black wings. It returned later that day and again the following day, but it hasn't been seen since. Burdette has promised to call if it returns.

The wave of black-necked stilt sightings in Ohio continued last week, when John Pogacnik spotted one of these beautiful waders on a private wetland in LeRoy Township in Lake County. Pogacnik, a park naturalist, photographed the stilt - a first for the county - as it circled overhead before it flew off to the south. At the Lorain Harbor impoundment, he found two American avocets and a willet among the shorebirds.

Ray Hannikman found a white-crowned sparrow in the brush at the entrance to Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor. Meanwhile, the white-throated sparrow in my Lakewood neighborhood continued to sing on Monday. Paula Lozano reported hearing one in her back yard about a mile from me.

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