



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Birders seek cure for the summertime blues - Aerial View

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These are hard times for birders.

There's a common misconception among nonbirders that winter is the slowest season. But we know it's the dog days of summer when the heat drains our energy and drives the birds into the shelter of cool, lush woodlands and grassy hiding places.

Our natural inclination is to park our binoculars for a few months and take a break from the birds. But that would eliminate the opportunity for special rendezvous with some of our most beloved neotropical visitors.

Jewels of the forest include the scarlet tanager, a surprisingly common though elusive flaming beacon of a bird with black wings and tail. The trick is to know the male's song, a raspy, robinlike presentation described as "hurry worry flurry blurry" in the Peterson field guide.

Still, picking tanagers out of the upper reaches of the canopy can be frustrating, as was the case last weekend during a Kirtland Bird Club field trip to Linda Gilbert's homestead in South Russell Township.

Gilbert works as a naturalist for the Geauga Parks District and every year hosts Kirtland Bird Club members on an outing to her 38-acre tract of woodlands, fields and a pond that has been in her family for three generations.

Wisely, much of the day was spent stomping around the habitat chasing butterflies and dragonflies, which are abundant on the property and more reliable than the birds this time of year.

That is not to say the feathered inhabitants didn't keep us hopping. Eastern kingbirds were noisy and territorial, surveying the grounds from treetops and chasing away any other birds that ventured too close. Rose-breasted grosbeaks, warbling vireos and great crested flycatchers called from unseen perches. A common yellowthroat and yellow warbler emerged from hiding in response to Jerry Talkington's squeaking calls and screech owl whistle.

Green and great blue herons abandoned the pond on our approach. Barn swallows and chimney swifts patrolled the sky overhead. And song and chipping sparrows sang from a stand of pines.

Raptors circled high in the sky just below the clouds. A broad-winged hawk caught our attention with its loud, two-note whistle, then took a swipe at a much larger red-tailed hawk, chasing it away.

Within minutes, an imposing, darker plumaged raptor appeared - a bald eagle - which rode the winds for a while before moving on.

Later during the weekend, a casual stroll through the Coventry Oaks section of the Firestone Metropolitan Park in Akron yielded several more of the expected species such as Baltimore oriole, Eastern wood pewee, red-eyed vireo, chipping and song sparrows.

These are the birds that will have to suffice until the next migratory wave of southbound shorebirds and songbirds arrives in the coming weeks.

Sightings

The variety of species remains intriguing along the Ledges trail in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, with hooded and black-throated green warblers, winter wrens and dark-eyed juncos present, Patrick Coy reported.

Rose-breasted grosbeaks and a purple finch visited Sally Isacco's feeders in Chardon.

The shorebirding prospects continue to show promise at the Lorain impoundment, where Gabe Leidy reported spotted, semipalmated and least sandpipers, willet and semipalmated plover.

Bird news

Bald eagles had banner nesting success in Ohio this year, according to biologists at the state's Division of Wildlife. The eagle population increased for the 21st consecutive year, with 184 nests - 20 more than last year - which produced 222 young. That was 28 more birds than last year and a far cry from 1979, when only four bald eagle pairs were in the state. Most of the nests are along the shores of Lake Erie on private property.

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