



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Shorebird followers migrate to Lorain County's Sandy Ridge Reservation

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Plain Dealer Reporter

The much-anticipated shorebird haven arising from the mudflats at the Lorain Impoundment remained a work in progress last weekend.

The 10-day river-dredge operation was pumping sludge in a steady gusher on Sunday, filling a network of ponds too deep, for now, for all but the longest-legged shorebirds to gain access to its bounty of insects.

Fortunately, Northeast Ohio birders in need of a sandpiper fix and lacking the time, fuel funds or inclination to travel to Conneaut Harbor had an old reliable shorebird habitat to fall back on.

Plan B required my son Bret and me to detour south from Lorain on Ohio 611 to the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville. Chief naturalist Tim Fairweather has done a fabulous job of managing the water levels of the southwestern pond, exposing broad swaths of mud that were covered with shorebirds on an unseasonably cool but sunny day.

Dozens of least and semipalmated sandpipers were scampering about in a feeding frenzy. They were joined by pectoral sandpipers, greater and lesser yellowlegs, semipalmated plovers, killdeer and an out-of-place Northern flicker.

Solitary and spotted sandpipers, plus a smattering of peeps and yellowlegs, also could be found prowling the shallows and shoreline along the trail and the pond edges.

A bald eagle surveyed the scene from a snag in the middle of the ponds, and a broad-winged hawk landed in a tree at the far southern end of the park.

At least a half-dozen red-headed woodpeckers, including at least one juvenile, called from a network of holes in dead trees where flocks of migrating purple martins were clustered on branches. Belted kingfishers chattered as they crossed back and forth.

A brilliant electric blue indigo bunting flitted in the grass gathering food, apparently undisturbed by our presence nearby. Warbling vireos, Eastern wood-pewees and song sparrows sang from the edges of the woods. And ruby-throated hummingbirds jostled for position on the feeder at the nature center.

Dull summer-plumaged wood ducks and green-winged teal dabbled in the ponds among great blue and green herons, great egrets and a single Caspian tern perched on a boulder. Another birder said she had seen an osprey there the previous day.

So although the water at the Lorain Impoundment may evaporate to ideal shorebird depths eventually, it may happen too late to be of use during the fall migration.

In that case, Sandy Ridge may prove to be the most productive sandpiper rest and feeding stop in the

greater Cleveland area.

Sightings

Two adult sandhill cranes and two chicks were in a field along Jug Road in Geauga County, Nancy Grossman reported.

An American avocet visited Conneaut Harbor over the weekend, Jen Brumfield and Gabe Leidy reported. Also there: marbled godwit, willet, sanderling, both yellowlegs, semipalmated and black-bellied plovers, short-billed dowitcher, least, spotted and semipalmated sandpipers and ruddy turnstone.

Chris Kidle is seeing a blue grosbeak at his backyard feeders in Nelson Township, Portage County.

A Northern bobwhite was calling last week outside Craig Griffin's office on Cleveland-Massillon Road a mile north of Ira Road in Bath Township, Marie Morgan reported.

An American bittern visited a pond in Mary Kelly's back yard in North Ridgeville on Sunday.

Henry Korecko has yellow-billed cuckoos nesting in a bald cypress in his Vermilion front yard.

Bird walks

At 8:15 a.m. Sunday, join the Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society on a walk at the Schoepfle Garden in Birmingham, Lorain County. Bill Deininger will lead. Meet at the visitor center, 11106 Market St. To get there, take Ohio 113 west to Birmingham, cross the bridge over the Vermilion River, turn onto the road on the left, Market Street. The garden is on the left.

At 8:30 a.m. Sunday, the Ohio Young Birders Club will hunt for shorebirds at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, marshes and beaches along the western Lake Erie shoreline. Jen Brumfield of Local Patch Birding will lead. Meet at the Black Swamp Bird Observatory Nature Center on Ohio 2 at the entrance of Magee Marsh. To register, call 419-898-4070.

Bird news

Ben Winger of Shaker Heights, a 2007 graduate of Cornell University's famed school of ornithology, was part of a three-member team that won the Student Quiz Bowl at the American Ornithologists Union's annual conference last week. Winger and his teammates triumphed in the Jeopardy-style quiz show by correctly answering the most bird-oriented questions dealing with field identification, videos of bird behavior, anatomy, taxonomy, history, hybridization, physiology and names.

Join Cleveland Metroparks naturalists Bob Hinkle and Sharon Hosko on a trip to Cape May, N.J., Monday, Oct. 5, to Thursday, Oct. 9, for the annual fall hawk migration. Cost is \$445, which includes transportation and lodging. To register, call 216-341-1704.

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