



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Lone American avocet spotted at Headlands Dunes

Lone American avocet is a striking presence on the shore

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On a steamy weekend that welcomed the first major movement of southbound songbirds to Northeast Ohio, the most remarkable sighting was a shorebird straggler.

The crew of talented birders who patrol Headlands Beach State Park and the surrounding habitat in the Mentor area launched the excitement with a big day on Saturday.

The warblers had returned in a major way with 13 species tallied, most of them at Mentor Lagoons, including a flock of five male hooded warblers, plus several chestnut-sided and black-and-white warblers.

The best of the bunch was a Connecticut warbler lurking near the shady pools that skirt the main trail to the beach.

Several yellow-bellied flycatchers awaited in the trees by the bluffs that overlook the lake. Both cuckoos made appearances or were heard, and a Baird's sandpiper was on the beach at the Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve.

Ray Hannikman's Internet post attracted a crowd on Sunday. But by then the primary flocks of warblers had dissipated. Several of our group reported Blackburnian, bay-breasted and magnolia warblers, and my son, Bret, and I found a blue-headed vireo and a mixed flock of red-eyed vireo, Baltimore oriole, Eastern wood-pewee, and several of the resident woodland species.

A bald eagle perched in a tree and perused the lake from the lagoon's bluffs, where a red-headed woodpecker called and a spotted sandpiper fluttered into view.

But awaiting at Headlands Dunes was a prized sighting: an American avocet.

Unfazed by the crowds of beachgoers and sunbathers, this stately and elegant wader strutted along the surf, appearing proud and aloof, mingling with the gulls and occasionally flushing to a new spot whenever scavengers or joggers ventured too near.

Its stunning breeding plumage of burnt orange had faded to beige on the head and neck, but its body remained boldly striped in black and white, which contrasted nicely with its pale blue legs and needle-thin upturned bill.

While we admired the avocet, flocks of eight to 10 sanderlings scampered in the sand and scurried just out of reach of the waves while probing for insects. These chunky peeps also had molted into their pale fall colors of white with black markings.

An osprey cruised by overhead and was gone in a flash.

The avocet was still there when we left at about 11 a.m. By the time this prairie pothole breeder finally reaches its winter destination on the Gulf of Mexico -- albeit via a circuitous route -- the bird will be reunited with its fellow species on the Texas or Mexican coast for the ensuing six months or so.

If it's smart, it will travel with the flock next time.

Sightings

The Shaker Lakes also experienced its first wave of the fall migration last week, where Julie West encountered Blackburnian, magnolia, black-and-white, Northern waterthrush and Canada warblers, plus olive-sided and yellow-bellied flycatchers, Gary Neuman reported.

Marian and Jeff Kraus had their first fall warbler, a Nashville, in their backyard bird bath.

Shorebirds continued to move through Ohio, with stilt, white-rumped and Baird's sandpipers at Willow Point Wildlife Area near Castalia, plus stilt sandpiper and American golden plover at the Pipe Creek Wildlife Area, Erie County, Gabe Leidy said.

At Medusa Marsh in Erie County, Jen Brumfield found tricolored and little blue herons, Wilson's phalarope, white-rumped, stilt and pectoral sandpipers, short-billed dowitcher, and black-bellied plover. Larry Rosche spotted a least bittern flying overhead there.

The Berlin Lake Wildlife Area in Portage County hosted nine species of shorebirds including Baird's, stilt and pectoral sandpipers, short-billed dowitcher and osprey, said Craig Holt. At Conneaut Harbor, he found American avocet, whimbrel, ruddy turnstone, black-bellied plover, sanderling, stilt, Baird's and pectoral sandpipers, short-billed dowitcher and Wilson's snipe.

An estimated 3,000 to 5,000 migrating purple martins gathered to roost at Nimisila Reservoir in Summit County last week, Marie Morgan reported.

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