



THE PLAIN DEALER

Lull in migration limits sightings

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James F. McCarty
Plain Dealer Reporter

When the birding is good in Northeast Ohio, you won't hear a contrary word out of me.

But when it is slow, I start to grumble about civilization's adverse impact on nature and the decline in bird populations since the good old days.

Boy, am I delusional.

In our parents' and grandparents' lifetimes, bird-watchers routinely pursued their hobby with a shotgun instead of binoculars.

Some of the finest restaurants offered robin, blackbird and sandpiper on the menu.

Women wore hats decorated with egret and heron plumes.

Hunters blasted passenger pigeons, Carolina parakeets and heath hens into extinction and used migrating raptors for target practice.

Collectors swapped California condor eggs and ivory-billed woodpecker skins like trading cards and sniffed at sissy Audubon conservationists.

From coast to coast, birders witness the legacy of this bygone era every time they spot a European starling or house sparrow, introduced species that proliferated to become scourges on our landscape.

Thankfully, enough native species have survived - if not flourished - to hold birders' interest. Conservation efforts during the past century have generally succeeded, in some cases spectacularly.

But the evidence was weak over the weekend.

At Headland Beach State Park in Mentor, the most excitement was found in dodging skunks on the trails and swatting biting flies on the beach.

The best birds were three sanderlings that scurried along the rocky shoreline, seemingly oblivious to their rapt audience. Baltimore orioles sang in the cottonwoods as if it were spring, perhaps anxious for their impending departure for Central American rain forests. Emil Basik whistled in an Eastern screech owl.

At Mentor Lagoons, a strong southern weather front stopped the migration in its tracks. Red-eyed vireos, Eastern wood-pewees and purple martins filled the ornithological void where warblers frolicked the week before.

The Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville was its usual birdy self but stocked with summer residents instead of newly arrived migrants.

Two singing scarlet tanagers in fall yellow plumage were enjoyable, as they left the dense foliage for the open stage. The other songbirds seemed skittish, however, as a prothonotary warbler, American redstart, red-eyed and warbling vireos, and blue-gray gnatcatchers flitted in and out of view.

A pair of adult bald eagles perched in a bare tree beside the path brought the morning walkers to a screeching halt.

The red-headed woodpeckers, Northern flickers, belted kingfishers, green herons, great egrets and indigo buntings remain in abundance. Several peeps and a yellowlegs flew overhead, but finding no mud, didn't bother to stop.

The wadies of midsummer at the Wellington Reservation have filled with water, attracting only wood ducks.

The vast fields are replete with goldfinch and field sparrows, while the treelines and brush have good numbers of Eastern kingbirds, pewees, bluebirds, cedar waxwings, Eastern phoebes and a few least flycatchers. A yellow-billed cuckoo called from the woods.

Sightings

The sand at Conneaut Harbor in Ashtabula County continues to attract migrating shorebirds. Weekend sightings included a flock of 22 American avocets, red knot, sanderling, stilt sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, ruddy turnstone and willet.

Mosquito Creek Wildlife Area in Trumbull County provided an alternate migratory stop, with western and white-rumped sandpipers, Wilson's phalarope, bobolink and warblers: prothonotary, hooded, Blackburnian and chestnut-sided, reported Gabe Leidy. Ethan Kistler spotted a whimbrel there.

A common loon was at LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County, Dave English reported.

Elmwood Park in Rocky River was a busy place. Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein reported Swainson's thrush, scarlet tanager and chestnut-sided, magnolia, Wilson's and American redstart warblers.

To reach Jim McCarty:

jmccarty@plaind.com, 216-999-4153

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