



# THE PLAIN DEALER

**AERIAL VIEW**

## **Birders float ideas on paying for programs**

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Birders are rarely required to Pay to Play in Ohio.

It appears that longstanding tradition may end soon, though -- which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Anyone who has traveled to some of the best birding parks in California or Colorado knows they probably will encounter ticket gates and \$6 fees at the entrances. Fortunately, it will be a long time before we see that happen in Ohio.

But maintaining premier parks such as Magee Marsh in Ottawa County, rescuing threatened species such as barn owls, bald eagles and peregrine falcons, and preserving millions of acres of precious birding habitat doesn't come without a price. Someone has to pay, and until now birders have been spared that expense.

Last week, I joined about 50 of the state's top birders and nature enthusiasts for a two-day brainstorming session at Shawnee State Park in southern Ohio. David Graham, chief of the state Division of Wildlife, invited us there to talk about ways to better engage birders and to seek our opinions about the willingness of birders to help save a dwindling resource for future generations.

We told him yes -- with several conditions.

"We need to change people's mind-sets from entitlement to privilege," said Larry Richardson, director of the Lake Erie Nature and Science Center in Bay Village.

The Division of Wildlife has traditionally been a "Hook and Bullet" agency focused on managing land and wild creatures for fishermen and hunters. But over the past decade or so, its attention has shifted to include an estimated 2 million birders, plus another 1 million birding visitors who enter the state each year.

"We have matured as a government agency," Graham told us. "We used to be afraid of you guys. We thought if we embraced you that you'd take over and there wouldn't be any hunting or fishing.

"But now I see us starting to congeal as one people, and it's only going to get better."

I was surprised to learn that the agency's wildlife diversity section operates without tax dollars, subsisting almost entirely on funds received from state tax check-offs and wildlife license plate fees.

While the number of hunters continues to decline, and the popularity of fishing fluctuates, the ranks of birders are steadily growing, Graham said. The challenge will be for all outdoors lovers to work together on behalf of wildlife.

For nearly a century, hunters have bought federal duck stamps used to purchase and preserve wetlands. Graham wondered if birders and other nature enthusiasts would be open to a similar state-run stamp program to help the agency reverse its declining funds.

We assured Graham that an annual contribution of \$25 or so would be embraced as a wise investment to assure that the parks, meadows, prairies and rivers we treasure, and the wild birds we enjoy so much, will be there for generations to come.

A bird stamp may one day be displayed proudly on binoculars or as a collector's pin worn on jackets or ball caps, suggested Bill Thompson III, editor of "Bird Watcher's Digest," based in Marietta.

But Dr. Bernie Master of Columbus warned Graham against making any support payments mandatory.

"Ohio birders wouldn't stand for it," Master said. "You have to keep it voluntary."

#### Sightings

The Lorain Impoundment was muddy, buggy and birdy over the weekend. My son Bret and I endured an hour-long rain shower, then enjoyed stunning views of 15 species of shorebirds, including Western, white-rumped, Baird's and stilt sandpipers, red knot, short-billed dowitcher and Wilson's snipe.

The woods at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville were alive with migrating songbirds, featuring our first blackpoll warblers of the fall, plus black-throated blue and green, Blackburnian, bay-breasted, chestnut-sided, magnolia, Wilson's and black-and-white warblers, yellow-throated vireo and osprey.

Gabe Leidy, leading a Kirtland Bird Club field trip at Headlands Beach State Park, spotted yellow-bellied flycatcher, gray-cheeked thrush and a blue-winged warbler. Sanderlings were on the beach.

Emil Bacik found a whimbrel on the breakwall at Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve.

A flock of more than 100 common nighthawks passed over a meadow in Kirtland Hills, Lake County, last week, Bob Faber reported. Also, Craig Griffin found a flock of nighthawks feeding over the soccer field at Old Trail School in Bath Township.

After the rain ended Sunday at Wildwood Park, Nancy Anderson spotted a yellow-billed cuckoo, Swainson's thrush, least flycatcher and lots of warblers, including: Nashville, chestnut-sided, magnolia, black-throated blue, Blackburnian, bay-breasted, blackpoll, Wilson's and ovenbird.

Two pine warblers were feeding in a locust tree in Jennifer Lenhart's Lakewood back yard.

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