



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Hurricane remnants could blow in rarities Aerial View

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The best birders I know are all Weather Channel watchers.

That's because, as birding becomes increasingly high-tech, knowledge of weather patterns helps birders to forecast migratory movements, predict fallouts and even anticipate ideal conditions for appearances by rarities.

It helps to know, for instance, that winds out of the northwest this time of year can bring jaegers and Sabine's gulls to the lakefront in Northeast Ohio.

Next month, winds out of the northeast may carry cave swallows, which showed up in the state for the first time two years ago.

Warm fronts out of the southwest in spring often bring waves of songbirds to Ohio. And sudden blustery winds and storms out of the north can cause warbler fallouts.

The opposite is true in the fall when swirling southerly winds can slam into songbirds crossing the lake, sending them plummeting, wet and exhausted, into our yards and parks along the lakeshore.

A veery flew into my front window in Lakewood on Sunday and lay stunned in my garden. I had to chase the cat away and place the handsome thrush in a bucket long enough for it to regain its senses and resume its journey south.

Historically, the remnants of hurricanes from the Gulf of Mexico have buffeted pelagic rarities and dropped them along the way. That's how magnificent frigatebirds, sooty terns, white ibis, long-billed murrelets, reddish egrets, and wood storks have shown up in Ohio in recent years.

And that's what had Northeast Ohio birders excited about the arrival on Sunday of the remnants of Hurricane Ike, which tore through Texas on Saturday and blew through Illinois, Indiana and Michigan earlier on Sunday -- dropping Gulf birds along the way.

It's the chance for a first state record bird that will have many of Ohio's best birders scouring the most reliable migrant traps over the next few days.

The possibilities are thrilling and nearly limitless, although I hesitate to even speculate for fear of hexing our luck. A skua? Tropicbird? Booby? Shearwater? Petrel?

So if you see a strange bird this week, don't brush it off as a "weird-looking pigeon" or something of the sort. If you have a camera handy, snap off a shot. Then call the phone number at the bottom of this column. I'll make sure the appropriate birders are notified immediately and you'll get credit for discovering a state record bird, as well as the everlasting gratitude of birders far and wide.

Of course, amid all the excitement, Kenn Kaufman reminds us to keep our priorities in perspective.

"Ike caused a huge amount of damage in Texas," he wrote in an e-mail post. "In talking about possible storm-related bird occurrences, I don't mean in any way to be making light of the destruction and suffering caused by the storm."

Sightings

Urban birder Audrey Malloy spotted an orange-crowned warbler in downtown Cleveland at the corner of East Ninth Street and St. Clair Avenue. I saw mourning, black-throated blue and American redstart warblers in the gardens beside the Cleveland Public Library.

Marilyn Szalay watched a mixed flock of cuckoos -- yellow-billed and black-billed -- eating tent worm caterpillars in the Rocky River Reservation.

Hundreds of chimney swifts are roosting at their traditional spot in Berea at the Fairwood School on Race Street, Annalee Vernon said.

Elmwood Park in Rocky River featured Philadelphia vireo, chestnut-sided warbler, gray-cheeked thrush, and sharp-shinned hawk, Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein reported.

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