



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Help birds survive their long migration - Aerial View

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Out of the corner of my eye I saw a flash of russet and had to duck to avoid being beaned.

The veery fluttered weakly past my head, struck our dining room window and plummeted into the garden.

Our tomcat, Charlie, appeared out of nowhere and prepared to pounce before I shooed him away and rescued the bird, a deep-woods thrush with an ethereal, swirling song.

The veery apparently had just completed an exhausting flight across Lake Erie. It regained its senses and resumed its journey to the South American rain forests, where it will spend the winter.

But millions of birds each year aren't so fortunate. Recent songbird studies have found that mortality rates during migration may be as high as 85 percent. Combined with the already shocking decline in many birds because of a loss of habitat, predation and pollution, it's a miracle that birders can find more than a few dozen different species this time of year.

There's much we can do to help the birds survive, some as simple as keeping house cats indoors - something I need to learn better. We can feed and landscape with bird-friendly plants, and support such organizations as the National Audubon Society and Nature Conservancy, and local groups such as the Kirtland Bird Club, the Black Swamp Bird Observatory and the Ohio Ornithological Society.

In the spring and fall, I'm reminded of the value of urban refuges - no matter how small - as I walk around downtown Cleveland and observe warblers, sparrows and thrush in the gardens on Public Square, at the Main Library and the National City Bank building.

I'm also reminded as I write this column, relaxing in the shade of my back yard, a lush postage-stamp-sized habitat busy with magnolia, American redstart and common yellowthroat warblers; red-eyed vireo; white-throated and Lincoln sparrows; Swainson's thrush; rose-breasted grosbeak; and brown thrasher.

A chestnut-sided warbler in its fall gray suit splashed merrily in the birdbath. And gray catbirds mewed from the shrubs as they gobbled dogwood berries.

In recognition of places that protect birds, Cornell University is holding a "Little Green Places" contest.

"We want to see photos, drawings or videos of Little Green Spaces that are good for birds because they provide shelter, food or water," said Karen Purcell, head of Cornell's Celebrate Urban Birds project.

"It could be an ivy-covered wall, flowers next to the stoop, a window box, a container garden on a rooftop or balcony, school garden, or potted plants by a library entryway."

As if we needed any further reminders, the importance of human assistance is driven home whenever I'm passing through the downtown canyons and come across a janitor sweeping the bodies of birds off the

sidewalks - casualties of overnight building strikes.

It's hard enough being a songbird flying up to 24,000 miles a year roundtrip, avoiding predators, buildings, wires and killer storms.

Making their journey a little safer is the least we can do.

After all, they make our lives so much more enjoyable.

For more information about the "Little Green Places" contest, check out the Cornell Web site at www.birds.cornell.edu/celebration/temporary/little-green-places-photo-video-contest.

Sightings

The weekend was ideal for watching migrants in Northeast Ohio. At Headlands Dunes State Nature Preserve in Mentor, birders spotted 15 species of warblers, included Northern Parula and Cape May. Bright Philadelphia vireos continue to show up. On the beach, at least four little gulls joined the flocks of Bonaparte's gulls, plus a sanderling and American pipit.

At the Wake Robin Trail in the Mentor Marsh, Jerry Talkington spotted a sedge wren.

The first Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows of the fall appeared at the Coliseum grasslands in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, per Gabe Leidy, and at the Arcola Creek Estuary in Lake County, per John Pogacnik.

At the Lorain Impoundment, Leidy found a red-necked phalarope.

A snow goose was in a pond on Johnson Road behind Stow-Munroe Falls High School, Greg Cudworth reported.

For more sightings check out the Aerial View bird blog at cleveland.com/neobirding/.

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