



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## A rare chance to see many migrating birds at nature preserve - Aerial View

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**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Weedy, buggy and balmy conditions made for a wonderfully birdy habitat Saturday at the Dike 14 Nature Preserve.

The 88-acre tract of reclaimed river dredge on Cleveland's East Side lakefront was the site of this month's Kirtland Bird Club field trip. Andy Jones led, and more than 50 birders turned out for this rare opportunity to legally enter the fenced-in, off-limits park.

Uncountable masses of migrating warblers and sparrows flitted and fluttered as our birding troupe approached. We crept down mowed trails carved through tall stands of Japanese knotweed, poison hemlock and a nasty mix of other invasive plants that have taken root on every inch of open soil.

The effect was kaleidoscopic and confusing. No sooner would you get a bird focused in your binoculars than three more would flash through your field of vision.

More times than not, the birds were yellow-rumped warblers - the abundant "butter-butts" of the boreal forests - on their way to the southern United States for the winter.

Such a profusion of birds was a joy, and everything different was a bonus. Black-throated green, Nashville, palm and Tennessee warblers and golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets all helped to break the monotony.

Most of the sparrows were white-crowns and white-throats, but Lincoln's, song, swamp, field and Savannah sparrows plus dark-eyed juncos, Eastern towhee, hermit thrush, Eastern phoebe, and winter and Carolina wrens also made appearances.

A racket of warning chips went up as a Cooper's hawk swept by on a hunt for an easy meal.

To top off a perfect fall weekend, my son Bret and I embarked on a chase Sunday to the Big Island Wildlife Area in Marion County, where a Hudsonian godwit had staked out a network of mud flats for the past week.

Most godwits migrate from their tundra nesting grounds nonstop to South America along the East Coast. But this bird chose to spend time in the Midwest bulking up along the shoreline of a shallow impoundment. It kept company with long-billed dowitchers, dunlins, greater yellowlegs, semipalmated sandpipers, Wilson's snipe and dozens of killdeer, American pipits, horned larks and Savannah sparrows.

Only a hint of the godwit's ruddy breast remained from its breeding plumage. It is gray and white and generally nondescript, but distinctive in shape and behavior, spending most of its day burying its long, upturned bill into the mud, searching for worms, insects and crustaceans.

The bands on the leg of this awesome bird told an impressive story of strength and perseverance. A student researcher who received the band codes identified the godwit as a male he had captured and

banded this past June at Churchill, Manitoba, on the Hudson Bay. The godwit and its mate had produced a nest with three eggs, which an unknown predator promptly ate shortly after they hatched.

Judging by the feast the godwit has been consuming at Big Island, it should have no problem laying on a healthy layer of fat to fuel its upcoming journey, thus increasing its odds for a successful return trip to Churchill next year and a renewed attempt at reproduction.

#### Sightings

Ammodramus sparrows continued to provide thrills for birders in Northeast Ohio last week. The best showing was at the Mentor Marsh, where up to a half-dozen Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows and several Le Conte's sparrows popped up on Saturday, Jerry Talkington reported.

At the Lorain Impoundment, Gabe Leidy and Jen Brumfield found a sharp-tailed sparrow plus a short-eared owl and flocks of pine siskins.

Dwight Chasar also flushed out a short-eared owl last week at the Coliseum grasslands in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

A snow goose was mingling with a flock of Canada geese in an industrial area near State and Quick roads in Cuyahoga Falls last week, Douglas Vogus reported. A blue phase snow goose was with the Canadas at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, Tim Fairweather said.

Hundreds of chimney swifts are roosting in two chimneys in downtown Akron, Marie Morgan said.

A wayward sea bird, possibly a long-billed murrelet, flew by a group of birders scanning the lake at Mentor Lagoons last week. Emil Bacik made the ID call.

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