



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## AERIAL VIEW

### Signs of winter in birds seen and not seen Aerial View

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Flocks of snow buntings touched down over the weekend at Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor.

Could winter be far behind?

Signs were everywhere in Northeast Ohio that cold weather was on the way, as multitudes of birds were on the move, coming and going.

The sparrows, thrushes, wrens and warblers that delighted us in October - gone.

Left behind were the dark-eyed juncoes, which will keep us company all winter long, and the stragglers that had it too good here to leave. Just give them a few more days of brisk northern winds and they'll be gone, too.

Arriving on those same gusts from across Lake Erie were the final waves of Canadian nesters: ruby-crowned kinglets, yellow-rumped warblers, chipping sparrows, and some surprises that should have passed through weeks ago. Blue-headed vireos popped up at Headlands and in my Lakewood back yard, as well as a late Northern parula warbler busily gleaning the branches of the white oaks over my back door.

On Saturday, I accompanied several groups of birders as we slogged and thrashed through knee-high grass in the Funk Bottoms wildlife preserve in Wayne County. It's a fabulous wetlands where Jim McCormac and other birders had encountered up to seven LeConte's sparrows at a time last week. But as the weather turned and the day waned, all my son Bret and I could find in the marshy habitat were swamp and song sparrows, Eastern bluebirds, American pipits and redheaded woodpeckers - nice birds, to be sure, but easily found closer to home.

Other birders reported single sightings of LeConte's and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows at the site. Our search for the needle in the haystack wasn't so fruitful.

Soggy and exhausted, we surrendered to the stealthy sparrows. At least we avoided getting shot, as duck hunters were out in force, blowing their mallard calls and blasting any waterfowl that dared to respond.

The ducks and geese must have known they'd be safer at the Wellington Reservoir in Lorain County, which hosted hundreds of them. Ruddy ducks dominated, accompanied by a smattering of canvasback, redhead, ring-necked, bufflehead, Northern shoveler and lesser scaup ducks; Canada geese; pied-billed grebes; and coots.

Ray Hannikman led the first shift of lake-birders off the dunes as we arrived, reporting sightings of fly-by black scoters, a long-tailed duck and a red phalarope. Bret, Ethan Kistler and I spotted flocks of dunlins, rusty blackbirds and snow buntings, plus four brants flying westward - the first of the month at the park.

Larry Rosche, in "Birds of the Cleveland Region," tells us that snow buntings are more plentiful some years than others. But come the end of October, these nesters of the Arctic tundra always seem to show up in

good numbers on the dunes at Headlands.

Snow buntings are handsome birds of rust and white, with black edgings that meld into their sandy surroundings. When disturbed, they explode into a flash of white and fly in a frenzied flurry that Pete Dunne says reminds him of a crazed snowflake.

#### Sightings

Birders found a Northern shrike near the Bradstreet Landing area of Rocky River, Bill Whan reported, adding additional credence to predictions of large movements of boreal birds into Ohio this winter.

Seven sandhill cranes were at the LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County, Mike Egar reported. Ray Smiley, past president of the Kirtland Bird Club, spotted two cranes flying over Burton Lake in Newbury Township.

Scanning the lake from his Perry Township perch, John Pogacnik reported sightings of fly-by red phalarope, surf scoter and common loon, plus large flocks of dunlins.

An American bittern was a nice find at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in Lorain County for Chris Matyus, Rob and Sandy Harlan on Sunday.

Pine siskins are filling up at Dorothy Dawson-Sheldon's feeders in Wakeman, Lorain County, along with the usual assortment of red-breasted nuthatches, purple, gold and house finches, Northern flickers and white-throated sparrows, she reported.

Employees rescued two black-capped chickadees that became trapped inside the Federal Office Building in downtown Cleveland last week, Cherie Mandel reported. The tiny chickadees gained entry after a worker left open a roof access panel.

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