



THE PLAIN DEALER

Aerial View: Changing weather brings array of birds to Northeast Ohio

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A smorgasbord of birds made appearances in Northeast Ohio last weekend.

This time of year, with the weather patterns in flux, birders are liable to find any of a vast array of species. It's all a matter of being in the right place when a rarity makes a showing.

If history was any indicator, Perry Township Park in Lake County was the place to be Saturday. Last year, during the same weekend, an invasion of jaegers harassing gulls over Lake Erie thrilled birders. The year before, Ohio's first cave swallows appeared at the park from across the lake.

But both of those memorable days were delivered courtesy of nasty northern winds. On this day, the breezes were out of the west - not exactly balmy, but it was sunny and comfortable compared with the previous two years.

No one was complaining, though, among the 40 members of the Kirtland Bird Club and the Ohio Young Birders Club, who enjoyed a bountiful morning spent watching common loons, horned grebes, common goldeneye and bufflehead ducks bobbing and diving in the lake; a little gull amid the multitudes of Bonaparte's gulls; two bald eagles; a sharp-shinned hawk; a flyby flock of snow buntings; a couple of pine siskins; and American pipits.

Many members of the group continued on to Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor, where we spotted a pair of black scoters and kicked up another, more impressive flock of snow buntings on the dunes. Later, we teamed up with a Local Patch Birding Tour outing led by Jen Brumfield and Gabe Leidy, who earlier had found a little gull and a flyover common redpoll with a bunch of goldfinch.

For many of us, the weekend was just getting rolling. My son, Bret, and I arrived at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville shortly after sunrise as the grassland species were beginning to stir. An Eastern meadowlark emitted a high buzzy call before taking off, and the rich, musical "tru-lys" of Eastern bluebirds filled the air.

Our good fortune continued when we ran into chief naturalist Tim Fairweather, who reported seeing a shorebird in the ponds but under poor light conditions. The bird was still there when we returned together to admire an energetic long-billed dowitcher feeding in the shallows.

The ponds were busy with waterfowl, and the grass was alive with sparrows. At least a dozen Northern pintail ducks were an especially welcome sight, with good numbers of ruddy, gadwall, ring-billed, Northern shoveler, American black, American wigeon and wood ducks; green-winged teal; and pied-billed grebe. A sharp-shinned hawk perched for a few minutes on a dead snag, and the resident pair of sandhill cranes made a noisy pass overhead.

Our first American tree sparrows of the fall were stunning in their bright rufous caps, and fine additions to the usual swamp, song, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows found in the scrub at Sandy Ridge.

An Eastern towhee replied to our prodding with a spirited "cherwink," and both species of kinglets delivered calls so high-pitched that only the sharpest ears could hear them.

Sandy Ridge only served to heighten our appetites for waterfowl, and we drove southwest to the Wellington Upground Reservoir, which was bursting with ducks. As usual, the ruddies predominated, followed by the coot, pintail, shoveler, greater and lesser scaup, ring-necked, canvasback, redhead and bufflehead ducks, pied-billed grebe and Canada geese.

Sightings

A remarkable flock of up to 30 evening grosbeaks has taken over the sunflower feeders at Linda Gilbert's yard in South Russell Village in Geauga County. Gilbert reported that a steady stream of birders has been visiting her home in recent days, and few have left disappointed. The last time grosbeaks visited her yard was November 1997. "The grosbeaks come and go intermittently from the feeders," Gilbert wrote. "Often, they are perched at the top of the maple tree in the back yard." For more photos of the grosbeaks, check out Ethan Kistler's shots at http://rarebird.org/forum/forum_posts.asp?TID=2418.

Other Northeast Ohio birders are seeing evening grosbeaks, although not as many as Gilbert. Photographer Gary Meszaros spotted a grosbeak at the nature center feeder at the North Chagrin Reservation. John Pogacnik had two visit his lakeside Perry Township yard in Lake County, along with a few pine siskins.

Ken Roth found a Northern shrike near the ponds at the Columbia Reservation in Lorain County.

From the Sims Park overlook in Euclid, Nancy Anderson spotted a solitary surf scoter, plus common loons and horned grebes.

Black and surf scoters also showed up at Rocky River Park, along with loons, grebes, bufflehead and common goldeneye ducks, Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein reported. Several Northern harriers made appearances at the nearby Bradstreet Landing.

A barred owl perched on the porch of Lakewood resident Mike Stetz's neighbor.

The area continued its amazing run on Northern saw-whet owl sightings last week when Cleveland Heights High School birder Phil Chaon found one of the pint-size owls being mobbed by songbirds in a tree along the trail to the breakwall at Headlands Beach State Park in Mentor.

Seven sandhill cranes continue to ply the sandbars at the LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County, Lyn Miller reported.

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