



# THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

## Fowl weather: Plenty of birds in snowstorm

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A near blizzard Sunday forced the cancellation of Christmas Bird Counts across the state.

Fortunately, birders on the Cleveland and Cuyahoga Falls counts managed to squeeze in productive days in the field before the blowing and drifting snow ended our revelry.

My theory is that Christmas counts, by design, tend to be conducted in uncomfortable conditions, which makes the visitors from the Great White North feel more at home.

How else to explain a Northern goshawk - an uncommon brawny raptor of Canadian forests - perched on a tree beside the Eastlake power plant at dawn on Saturday?

What was a long-tailed duck doing diving for fish along the East 72nd Street stretch of Gordon State Park in Cleveland while tens of thousands of its co-species were flocking on the Niagara River and Lake Ontario?

And why had 15 yellow-rumped warblers - insect-eating boreal breeders that usually spend the winter in the South - decided to stick around wintry Ohio in the middle of December, feeding in a mixed flock along the Cuyahoga River in Kent?

All of these birds ended up on our Christmas tally sheets over the weekend, joined by some other notable sightings.

Sometimes, the sheer numbers of birds observed are enough to make your jaw drop.

Larry Rosche, our group leader on both of the outings, has been participating in CBCs for nearly 40 years. Still, he was amazed by the half-dozen or more lesser black-backed gulls feeding at the East 72nd Street warm-water release site. These European breeders are considered uncommon on the East Coast and scarce in the Great Lakes, but the field guide authors are going to have to update their distribution maps.

In a typical year, the two common redpolls at a backyard feeder in Kent on Sunday might have been the bird sightings of the day. But not this year, as flocks of northern finches invade our state in search of more abundant seed supplies in the wake of a poor seed crop in Canada.

Our tally sheets contained no harlequin duck, white-eyed vireo or Northern shrike, as in years past. But there is still time to make amends for those absences over the next week and a half, when the final five Christmas counts will be held in Northeast Ohio.

Sightings

Judy Semroc was driving through Suffield Township, Portage County, on her way to the Cuyahoga Falls Christmas Bird Count on Sunday when she spotted a barn owl in her car's headlights.

The bird foraging beneath Sally Isacco's feeders in Chardon last week seemed odd and out of place - and it was. The ovenbird was just two weeks short of being the latest sighting of its species ever in Northeast Ohio.

Northern shrikes made appearances at Buckeye Woods in the Medina County Parks, spotted by Steve Borgis, and at the Sandy Ridge Reservation in the Lorain County Metro Parks, found by Rita Schneider.

The merlin population keeps mounting at Calvary Cemetery in Garfield Heights, where there are now three, Lou Gardella reported.

Rocky River continued to be a Bohemian waxwing hot spot, as Dan Sanders and Ben Warner of Columbus found two feeding on crab apples at the Lakewood Cemetery on Detroit Road. Bill Whan reported a BoWax earlier in the week at Rocky River Park.

A male white-winged crossbill spent several days at John Pogacnik's feeders in Perry Township, Lake County. Other feeder birds: common redpoll, pine siskin, golden-crowned kinglet. Spotted from his lakeside observation point: purple sandpiper, Franklin's gull and all three scoters.

A Ross's goose discovered by Suzanne Wagner at Lakewood Park continued to delight dozens of birders throughout the week. The dainty white goose with a stubby pink bill has been communing with the large flock of part-time resident Canada geese. For a photograph, check out my birding blog at: [blog.cleveland.com/neobirding](http://blog.cleveland.com/neobirding).

Congratulations to Bernie Horbol of Westlake, who, inspired by his success attracting an Eastern screech owl to a back yard nesting box, constructed 11 more boxes and gave them as gifts to his friends. Also, kudos to Barbara Savage for attracting a screech owl to a nesting box in her Mentor back yard for the second consecutive year. All of which, I am embarrassed to say, serves as a reminder that my owl box has hosted only squirrels and starlings.

The Headlands Crew witnessed a phenomenal migration flight last week of 200 common redpolls, a dozen pine siskins and more than 200 American robins along the lakefront trail at Mentor Lagoons, Ray Hannikman reported.

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Bird news

Perfectly timed for Christmas shoppers, photographer Jim Roetzel of Cuyahoga Falls has released his second compilation of nature photographs, this one dedicated entirely to birds.

It is titled "Birds of North America," and it is a magnificent work of art. Many of the birds were photographed in Northeast Ohio, with several fine shots from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

"It's absolutely beautiful," said Jean Patey of Twin Lights Publishers in Rockport, Mass. "Jim really seems to understand birds. He gets into the heads of these animals and captures what they're all about."

The book is available at all major chain bookstores, plus at many Wild Birds Unlimited and Wild Bird Centers stores. It retails for \$26.95.

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