



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## AERIAL VIEW

### Day of great birding beats any gift under the tree

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**James F. McCarty**  
Plain Dealer Reporter

I don't think I'm going too far out on a limb when I say that birders don't need a new field guide or the latest electronic gizmo for attracting, identifying or photographing birds to make the holiday season a success.

If you're like me, all it takes to capture the Christmas spirit are a memorable sighting, a few days hiking in the field and some quality time with like-minded birding buddies.

What a joy it was to avoid the shopping crowds and traffic jams of a busy pre-Christmas weekend, and to escape to the wilds of Lorain County for a day spent birding some of our favorite hot spots.

For me, the 2007 holiday season will be memorable for the pair of long-eared owls roosting in the pines at the Caley Reservation, courtesy of Matt Vosniak, who discovered and photographed the secretive night-hunters.

The glaucous gull at the Oberlin Reservoir might as well have been gift-wrapped - its pure white plumage stuck out so brightly among the flocks of ring-billed and herring gulls with their gray backs.

Likewise with the canvasback duck at the Wellington reservoir, the only one of its kind visible among the multitudes of ring-necked, bufflehead, scaup, ruddy, black and mallard ducks, hooded mergansers, pied-billed grebes and Canada geese gathered there.

American kestrels are always welcome sights across the county and were actively hunting at Caley, Sandy Ridge and Wellington. A pair of Northern harriers, Cooper's and red-tailed hawks also were cruising the fields in search of prey. Northern flickers seemed to have disappeared over the past month but were widespread on Saturday.

So keep in mind that what counts most for birders during the holiday season may not be what's under the Christmas tree, but what's in the trees outside.

#### Sightings

The extra vacation time provided a plethora of bird finds. A Northern goshawk strafed Craig Caldwell's yard in Westlake, then perched for a few minutes before continuing east.

Common redpolls continued to provide thrills. Lou Gardella had a pair at his feeders in Garfield Heights. Up to eight snacked on sunflowers at Donna Kronander's home in Medina Township. Carol Takacs welcomed about 50 to her feeders in Madison, where earlier in the week she had 16 pine siskins.

Pine siskins also made appearances in Brecksville near the Sleepy Hollow Golf Course, Jen Brumfield reported, and at the Holden Arboretum, reported Becky Thompson.

There were several reports of a European goldfinch - probably an escaped caged bird - at feeders in

Mayfield and Cleveland Heights, said Wally Mueller and Elisa Lyth.

Rough-legged hawks appeared in Medina County, at Burke Lakefront Airport, the Cuyahoga County Airport and in Geauga County, per Jeff Wert, Suzanne Wagner, Ray Hannikman and Inga Schmidt.

Schmidt also reported the return of a Northern shrike to her property. Shrikes also turned up at the Sandy Ridge Reservation and the Coliseum grasslands in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, per Tim Fairweather and Robert Jackson.

For more than a week, a long-tailed duck has staked out the Gordon State Park boat basin as its feeding grounds, providing awesome views for dozens of birders.

Also along the Cleveland lakefront, Dick and Jean Hoffman reported an eared grebe among the horned grebes in the boat basin, all three scoters at Edgewater and Rocky River parks, plus a short-eared owl and Northern harrier at Burke. Glaucous, Iceland and lesser black-backed gulls were at the East 72nd Street warm water release site, said Gabe Leidy, and Jerry Talkington found a Northern gannet there.

Several flocks of snow buntings were in the fields on Ohio 57 between Grafton and Medina, Bob Cestaro reported.

Chris Followay found a short-eared owl on Ohio 585 just south of Rittman.

Eastern bluebirds have taken a liking to peanuts at Kathleen Beard's feeders in Chagrin Falls and are roosting in the nesting boxes on cold nights, she reported.

Add Joyce Calo of Mentor to the growing list of those who have successfully attracted Eastern screech owls to backyard nesting boxes. I need to learn your secrets.

McCarty is a reporter for The Plain Dealer.

To reach James F. McCarty:

[jmccarty@plaind.com](mailto:jmccarty@plaind.com), 216-999-4153

Previous columns online:

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