

The erulean

Quarterly Newsletter of the Ohio Ornithological Society

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From the Editor

Wood Thrushes have returned, filling dawn and dusk with their throughout Eastern North our children and grandchildren. Wood Thrush is listed by 'Partners' in Flight' as of continental its population has been lost over the past 50 years or so, and with the current trend, its half-life (another 50% loss) is estimated at 31 years. Wood Thrushes still do rather well in Ohio, where their unglaciated parts of the state over the last century. Although Ohio's population makes up only about 5%, or about 1.5 million birds, of the global population, Ohioans can help stabilize this bird-friendly coffee. The story behind the Coffee-Wood Thrush connection plays out in Central America where high rates of deforestation are seen. When our Wood Trushes vacate their huge North American breeding range for their tropical time off, their entire population contracts Deforestation takes away crucial chances of survival and successful can help our Wood Thrushes by certified by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. This coffee is grown under a canopy of shade trees, creating an 'agroforest' habitat for many migrating and resident birds.

Stefan Gleissberg ceruleaneditor@ohiobirds.org

2017 Wetland Habitat Conservation Stamp

OOS board member Randy Rogers represented our society as a judge for the 2017 Wetland Habitat Conservation Stamp (also known as 'duck stamp') contest. Five judges representing hunting, conservation.

and ornithological backgrounds reviewed 14 submissions for this year's contest, sponsored annually by the Ohio Division of Natural Resources and hosted by the Ohio chapter of Ducks Unlimited. Through five rounds of judging the field was narrowed to an eventual single selection.

Submissions are judged on several factors, including technical portrayal of the species, suitability for the stamp format, and artistic appeal. Some really beautiful work was passed over for reasons such as the background not feeling "Ohio" enough, the shading on the head of a Blue-winged Teal being just not quite the "right" blue, and even that the incredible level of detail on one submission might not translate well on a stamp-sized print.

Another interesting selection was painted in an almost folksy American Modernism style, similar to what Charley Harper



Matt Shumar, Jerry Kripp, Joe Uecker

described as "minimal realism". That submission caught the attention of the judges, but ultimately was found lacking in execution.

The final selection portrayed a pair of Ring-necked Ducks swimming into what Randy interpreted as sunset lighting. This was the first duck stamp victory for Ohio artist Dan Allard, who has placed several times in the competition at both the state and federal level.

Funds raised through the sale of stamps fund the restoration, enhancement, protection and management of wetlands. Purchase of the stamp is required for Ohio waterfowl hunters and encouraged for birdwatchers and other conservationists. Forty percent of the proceeds protect breeding grounds in Canada for ducks that migrate through Ohio, and the program has raised \$10.4 million since its inception in 1982.

Local Birding Series

Carroll County Teaming up for a County Big Year

By Jon Cefus

It may not come as a surprise that most of Ohio's 88 counties are "under-birded". We tend to go where the reports are generated and go back to the spots we know, and seldom explore new areas.

In 2015, Kent Miller and I joined Ben Morrison in Noble County to survey the bird species in one of the least birded counties in Ohio. In 2016, we decided to make Carroll our target county for many of the same reasons: Carroll is almost completely unglaciated and is much underbirded.

Attempting to survey an area that does not often get investigated is challenging. Where are the areas with habitat that can potentially hold species? Which roads allow access when public land is not available?

As of January 1, 2016, Carroll was ranked 82nd of 88 Ohio counties in eBird, with a total of 181 species reported to the citizen science portal. Of course, some species may have been reported elsewhere in the past.

Bill Whan pointed us to Forest Buchanan's "The Breeding Birds of Carroll and Northern Jefferson Counties, Ohio" (Ohio Biological Survey, 1980). Buchanan was a resident of Amsterdam, Ohio, a sleepy town located at the intersection of the two counties. In fact, a deteriorating sign on State Route 43 declares

Amsterdam the home of "Forest Buchanan, educator, naturalist, and Amazon explorer." His book provided us with a perspective on habitat loss across our state. Today, the Atwood Lake and Leesville Lake regions – part of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy district – represent two of the few areas of public land in Carroll County. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of Ohio and Kent State University manage Stillfork Swamp Nature Preserve. Access to this area is restricted, but we gained permission from TNC by sharing our bird survey data.

We had a good start on January 2 with 43 species, beginning with Fargo Road that allows roadside access to deciduous forest, open



agricultural fields, reclaimed unmowed land, and a small marsh with cattails. In this part of the county, Carolina (more prevalent) and Black-capped Chickadees intersect, and we were able to find both species on our first day. Our efforts were concentrated around Atwood Lake and Leesville Lake where we located eight species of waterfowl, including Common Loon and Pieθbilled Grebe. We made our first trip to Stillfork Swamp and found several overwintering Eastern Towhees, as well as 3 Black Vultures near Carrollton.

February and March brought us 16 and 20 duck species, respectively. Kent discovered Bellflower Road, where we found a flock of 83 *Greater White-fronted Goose*, as well as *Snow Goose* and *Cackling Goose*. *Snow Buntings*

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and a Lapland Longspur were foraging in spread manure near a dairy farm, a Wilson's Snipe was wintering near a freshwater spring, and on February 29 a Northern Shrike (a county-first) was found in appropriate habitat not far from where Bellflower Road crosses Stillfork Creek. On March 12, Ben and I were on a hilltop overlooking Stillfork Swamp and found ourselves conducting an impromptu hawk watch when we noticed two Peregrine Falcons, Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrels, Red-shouldered Hawk, Redtailed Hawk, and both Turkey and Black Vultures. While scanning the skies, a Barred Owl sounded off in the hardwood forest below us.

A few days after this, Kent and Ben located a pair of Sandhill Cranes near some private ponds along Bane Road not far from Stillfork Swamp. Our photos taken provided the first documented Carroll county sighting in eBird. Before March was over, we had seen Osprey, Eastern Phoebe, Purple Finch, Rusty Blackbird, Fox and Vesper Sparrow, Pine Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and American Woodcock.

By the end of April, we had seen 114 species in the county, with 20 species being new eBird records. At Stillfork Swamp, we found both *Virginia Rail* and *Sora*. Warbler migration was hit-and-miss, but we managed to come up with 23 species before the month ended, and 18 new for the year. We found good numbers of nesting warblers such as *Louisiana Waterthrush*,

Hooded, Blue-winged, Yellow, Pine, Yellow-throated, Prairie, American Redstart, Black-and-White, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, Cerulean, and Kentucky Warbler; and Yellowbreasted Chat (not considered a member of the wood warbler family now).

Shorebirds in Carroll are quite difficult to locate. With so much of the county unglaciated, there are precious few flat areas that can produce favorable habitat, but we did manage to locate Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Killdeer, Pectoral Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, and Spotted Sandpiper. Adjacent to Stillfork Swamp Nature Preserve, we heard Wilson's Snipes winnowing over the course of a few weeks, mostly in ponds in agricultural fields.

On April 25, Kent and Ben heard a county-first Western Meadowlark in the fields along Fargo Road that hold good numbers of Eastern Meadowlarks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolinks, and Dickcissels. At the marshy bottom of Fargo Road, Su Snyder and Sue Evanoff found a Common Gallinule a few days later, another county-first.

As expected, May was a productive month for our team. We added 37 new species to our survey. On May 23, Kent found a male Mourning Warbler near Fargo Road and a young male Prothonotary Warbler singing in the eastern marsh area of Atwood Lake. Both were county-firsts. We reported 33 warblers, but still missed some that may fall into the realm of realistically possible: Golden-winged, Worm-

eating, Connecticut, and Kirtland's (perhaps being generous with the term "realistic"). Earlier in the month, we were joined by Terry and Barb Sponsellor at Stillfork Swamp and had the good fortune to see a rare Lawrence's Warbler (a Blue-winged x Golden-winged Warbler backcross hybrid). While not "countable" as a separate species, this was a wonderful experience and a first for several people in our group. At the conclusion of that day's walk, we heard a *Least Bittern* calling from a flooded agricultural field along Stillfork Creek.

Ben Morrison and Shari Jackson found an Olive-sided Flycatcher at Stillfork Swamp, for a total of seven flycatchers in May. We had six species of Vireos across the county before the month was over and added Semi-palmated Plover, Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers to our shorebird list. I had a particularly productive evening at Atwood Lake on my way home from work on May 17 when I spotted a Black Tern (countyfirst) working the lake, a mixed flock of Common and Forster's Terns (both county-firsts), and a couple of Common Nighthawks as the daylight faded into night. On May 28, we saw our first Dickcissels along Fargo Road, our group's last new species of the vear until September 1!

June, July, and August, not surprisingly, were very slow months. On August 2 I saw my first Caspian Tern of the year with their numbers peaking at 13 individuals on August 11. Black-throated Green Warblers







were added to the list of nesting warblers over those summer months. We also know that Cerulean Warblers nest in Carroll, but I was not able to find any during those months, primarily due to a lack of access to land. I did find and photograph a pair of Blue-beaded Vireos near Wattsville in June, suggesting that species may be nesting in the area. On two occasions a Dark-eyed Junco fly off of the side of the road near Leesville Lake, which could mean that this species is nesting somewhere in the ravines.

Kelly and George Benish had seen *Black-crowned Night Herons* while kayaking at Atwood Lake, adding to a few historical sightings at this lake. This put that species on my radar, and finally, on September 1, I found a juvenile bird near the east end of the lake. One of the best moments of the year for the three of us was on a warm and humid morning as we passed through pastures to begin a walk at Stillfork Swamp. Two beautiful *American Golden Plovers*

dropped out of the sky into a field of cattle, mud, and Killdeer. We were left contemplating our good fortune and the remarkable journey that these birds undertake each year between their wintering grounds in South America and their tundra nesting areas.

October produced no new species, but on November 12, after several weeks of keeping an eye out for them, a flock of Tundra Swans flew over Atwood Lake. December brought two more species: a raft of four Black Scoters at Atwood Lake on December 3, a county-first, and a Lesser Black-backed Gull on December 11, resting on the ice on Atwood Lake with Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

Our group total reached 216 species in Carroll in 2016, adding 35 species to the eBird records. Carroll was lifted from rank 82 of 88 Ohio counties to 55 in species seen, which seems appropriate considering the limitations of habitat for wetland species, the relatively few eyes birding the

county, and limited access. 1135 checklists were generated in the county last year, which ranked 23rd in Ohio – quite remarkable for a small, largely unglaciated rural Ohio county. The top spots birded in the county were Atwood Lake (156 species), Stillfork Swamp Nature Preserve (151 species), and Fargo Road (145 species). Some of the species we would have liked to locate included Blue Grosbeak, Summer Tanager, Barn Owl, and Ruffed Grouse.

I hope to inspire readers to undertake a survey in an underbirded area near you. Even counties that receive a great deal of attention have undiscovered areas that have slipped past the radar of birders. While it admittedly can be a demanding undertaking at times, when the year is over it feels good to know that maybe you have helped to increase the understanding of bird species and the challenges they face.



By Laura Keene Photos by Laura Keene

Big Year birding – observing as many species as possible between January 1 and December 31 – has fascinated me for years. It was only in my wildest dreams that I thought I would have the chance to do an American Birding Association (ABA) area Big Year at all, let alone be one of four birders to break Neil Hayward's seemingly insurmountable record of 749 species set in 2013. I started 2016 with a more modest goal: seeing 700 species of birds, photographing as many of those as I could. But before I knew it, the spirit of competition and the support of my birding friends had motivated me to earn a seat in the "700 Club" with over a third of the year left to go.

When the dust settled, I had recorded 759 ABA-listed species, plus 3 provisionals awaiting acceptance by the checklist committee. I set a new photographed species record, documenting 741 of the little feathered buggers. (Not all so little, come to think of it – there is a California Condor in the collection after all.) The photos were often diagnostic quality only, taken from a rocking boat, or on a foggy morning, in glaring afternoon sun, in the rain, in the snow, and sometimes through a window or fogged lens. With the focus on quantity rather than photo quality, I had to accept that most of the images were not going to be up to my usual standards.

Laura Keene is an avid birder and photographer from Southwest Ohio. Her photography has been published in National Parks Magazine, National Geographic, and multiple news outlets. She is a former photoeditor for the Ohio Cardinal. In 2016 she followed her dream and pursued an ABA Big Year.

Although Big Year birding is all about the count, each bird had a story. Each path traced on the map is a part of a life journey with experiences often touching and profound. As a photographer, I strive to capture the moment through my images. Sometimes, though, the stories are begging to be shared in another medium. So along with my photos, here are two of the many stories from my amazing year. Each one relates, in its own way, what a Big Year involves.

People who touch your life...

When traveling alone in an unfamiliar area, there's no sight more welcome than a group of people clustered around spotting scopes. Cape Sable Island in Nova Scotia was NOT that kind of spot; the day I arrived to look for a Curlew Sandpiper, I felt like the only person on the entire island. I set up my scope and hopelessly scanned through the hundreds of shorebirds foraging far in the distance. Thankfully, I wasn't alone after all. A friendly local birder arrived, introducing herself as Cal. She was meeting a woman named Liz from Halifax to show her the *Curlew Sandpiper*. BINGO! She invited me to join her. I followed her car down the road, and we met up with Liz. Cal told me that Liz was an astute birder who helped others with IDs on the Nova Scotia Facebook site. Cal also explained that Liz was deaf, but could read lips. We hiked a good distance to an area I would have never found on my own.

After a while, Cal said the tide was coming in, and had to get home to start dinner. She left Liz and me to scan through the thousands of birds that were moving in. A cooperative *Piping*

Plover landed nearby, but that was not our focus. For the next couple of hours Liz studied the nearer birds with her bins, and I checked those more distant with my scope, occasionally trading off. We were barely able to communicate; perhaps I was speaking faster than Liz could read my lips, or there was some other complication, but sometimes we resorted to writing in the sand. Nonetheless, it was clear that we shared a passion for these feathered creatures.

Liz suddenly got excited and tried to tell me something. Godwit! She took over the scope and focused on a pair of *Hudsonian Godwit* that had just landed. It was a year bird for my list! A little while later, she pointed out a nearby *White-rumped Sandpiper*. Another year bird! We continued to scan as the tide brought the shorebirds closer.

Just as the sun reached the horizon I spotted what I'd come to Nova Scotia to see: the *Curlew Sandpiper*. I tapped her shoulder to get her attention and gave her a big smile. She hurriedly looked through my scope for her life bird and #378 for her Nova Scotia list. #698 on my year list. We high-fived and hugged in our excitement. It was a magical day of birding.



Vova Scotia









Steller's Eider

Birds transformed...

The Pectoral Sandpiper is an unremarkable shorebird that passes through Ohio every spring and fall, and I counted one in late March during my Big Year with barely a second glance. Its larger size relative to the peeps with yellow legs, short bill, and heavily streaked chest set it apart from the other migrating shorebirds

found in the marshes of Lake Erie and the mudflats of the state, but none of these features are striking enough to make it memorable.

So, when I visited Barrow, Alaska three months later, the *Pectoral Sandpiper* wasn't really on my radar. Visiting Barrow in June is a necessity for anyone who wants to see Arctic tundrabreeding birds in their spring

finery. Some 350 miles north of the Arctic Circle, Barrow marks the northernmost point in the United States. In mid-June, its Arctic Ocean shore is a heaving mass of towering ice blocks. Visitors face the unaccustomed challenge of circadian rhythms in turmoil, with the dim but persistent sunlight creeping through the edges of curtains to fool the mind into thinking that it's still not quite time for sleep.

Red Phalaropes, occasionally seen in Ohio during fall migration, breed on the coastal tundra. Though their shape is familiar, the monochromatic plumage has turned from white to flame. Lapland Longspurs seem transformed both in look and personality, radiantly warbling

throughout the day while perched and in flight. Then I got word of a *Red-necked Stint* sighting. My Big Year list had opportunities to increase by the hour.

Amongst the stunning Steller's, Spectacled, and King Eider, a familiar species made a raucous landing: the Pectoral Sandpiper.

Even in the moment of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to capture an image of a Steller's Eider rearing out of the water in a courtship display, I was distracted by the Pectoral Sandpiper who demanded to be the center of attention.

His mating call echoed through the chill, otherworldly hoots that steadily rose in pitch and tempo. The name Pectoral suddenly made sense, his hormone-driven chest puffed up during his flight display. This shorebird that transits Ohio without distinctiveness managed to make himself a spectacle in Barrow, Alaska for the female he was trying to woo.

After seeing him in his element on the tundra, I will never look at the *Pectoral Sandpiper* in the same way again.









Ohio Birding Resources

Check out these organizations for up-to-date field trip and event info! If you want your local bird club listed here, contact ceruleaneditor@ohiobirds.org

American Avian Conservation and Research Institute

tuckercasey.wixsite.com/aacri-birds

Athens Area Birders groups.io/g/athensbirders

Audubon Ohio, Cincinnati Chapter *cincinnatiaudubon.org*

Blackbrook Audubonblackbrookaudubon.org

Black River Audubon blackriveraudubon.org

Black Swamp Bird Observatory bsbo.org

Brooks Bird Club brooksbirdclub.org

Canton Audubon cantonaudubon.org

Columbus Audubon columbusaudubon.org

Greater Cleveland Audubon clevelandaudubon.org

Greater Mohican Audubon gmasohio.org

Kirtland Bird Club kirtlandbirdclub.org

Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative obcinet.org

Ohio Bluebird Society ohiobluebirdsociety.org

Ohio Young Birders Club ohioyoungbirders.org

Tri-Moraine Audubon *tri-moraineaudubon.org*

Western Cuyahoga Audubon *WCAudubon.org*

Birding Calendar around Ohio

Please confirm event details and registration needs using the links provided.

Saturday, 13 May Global Big Day ebird.org

13-14 May Marsh Madness Ohio Ornithological Society ohiobirds.org

Sunday, 14 May Big Bailey Wetland Bird Walk with Bob Scott Placier Athens Area Birders groups.io/g/athensbirders

Monday, 15 May
'Raptor Banding through the Seasons' with Jeff Hays
Audubon, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnatiaudubon.org

Wednesday, 17 May 'Trekking Nepal and Katmandu' with Gordon Maupin Canton Audubon cantonaudubon.org

Wednesday, 17 May
Evening Bird Walk at Huntington
Reservation
Western Cuyahoga Audubon
wcaudubon.org

Saturday, 20 May
Mariemont Garden Parks
Audubon, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnatiaudubon.org

Saturday, 20 May Birding at Greenlawn Columbus Audubon columbusaudubon.org

Saturday, 20 May Magee Marsh Field Trip Blackbrook Audubon blackbrookaudubon.org Sunday, 21 May **Squire Valleevue Farm Field Trip**Kirtland Bird Club

kirtlandbirdclub.org

Thursday, 25 May **Hocking Hills Field Trip** Brooks Bird Club brooksbirdclub.org

Thursday, 1 June
The Wilds Field Trip
Brooks Bird Club
brooksbirdclub.org

2-3 June
Optics Fling
Time & Optics
Millersburg, Ohio
bsbo.org

Saturday, 3 June
Birding at Acacia Reservation
Western Cuyahoga Audubon
wcaudubon.org

Sunday, 4 June
Birding by Kayak
Columbus Audubon
columbusaudubon.org

Thursday, 8 June
Crown City Wildlife Area Field Trip
Brooks Bird Club
brooksbirdclub.org

9-10 June
Ohio's Grassland Birds
The Wilds
Ohio Ornithological Society
ohiobirds.org

Saturday, 10 June
Breeding Birds, Butterflies and
Wildflowers
Warder Perkins Preserve
Audubon, Cincinnati Chapter
cincinnatiaudubon.org



Saturday, 17 June **Grassland Birds** Fernald Preserve Audubon, Cincinnati Chapter cincinnatiaudubon.org

25-27 August On the Trail of E. Lucy Braun Shawnee State Forest Audubon, Cincinnati Chapter midwestnativeplants.org

The Cerulean | Newsletter of the Ohio Ornithological Society Dr. Stefan Gleissberg: Editor, Photo Editor, Layout



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The Ohio Cardinal is our quarterly periodical that includes the current season's bird sightings and scientific articles.

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