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The Ohio Cardinal is a quarterly publication devoted to the study and appreciation of Ohio's birdblife.

The Ohio Cardinal exists to provide a permanent and timely record of the abundance and distribution of birds in Ohio; to help document the occurrence of rare species in the state; to provide information on identification of birds; and to provide information on birding areas within Ohio.

The Ohio Cardinal invites readers to submit articles on unusual occurrences of birds, bird distribution within the state, birding areas in Ohio, identification tips, and other aspects of ornithology. Bird reports and photographs are welcome from any area of the state. Report forms are not a necessity but will be supplied upon request. Unusual species should be documented, and forms to do so are available upon request from the Editor, Publisher, and Records Committee Secretary.

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On the Cover: This Bell's vireo was photographed along the Heritage Rail-Trail adjacent to The Homestead Park in Franklin County on 21 May 2003 by Bob Royse.

Spring 2003 Overview
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This spring's weather played a part in several widely-noticed events. The cold winter hemmed in some remarkable assemblies of waterfowl at inland sites (especially along major rivers), and of larger gulls along the Lake Erie shore during a chilly first half of March. Most memorable among water birds were red-necked grebes, whose numbers set records statewide from the beginning of the period through early May. Later, turbulent weather to our south, with record numbers of tornadoes (562 in May, versus 399 for the previous record high, and weather conditions on 12 of the first 15 days of May characterized as "severe" by meteorologists), bottled up migrants until they exploded 10-12 May in concentrations that had even veterans' jaws dropping. A chilly and rainy latter half of May—reminiscent of last year's—slowed things down noticeably, delaying some Neotropical migrants (20 warbler species still at Magee on 28 May is pretty unusual), as well as causing some mortality among nesting birds.

As for other species, American white pelicans and golden eagles continued their recent regional increases. Though 29 species were reported, a dearth of suitable mudflats kept most shorebird numbers low. "Grasspipers" like golden-plovers and pectoral sandpipers, however, had a field day, with some enormous numbers reported. Our first confirmed loggerhead shrike nest since 1999 was found. Woodland thrushes seemed eerily hard to find this spring.

Ten review species were reported, all documented for the records committee: tricolored heron (2), glossy and white-faced ibises, Ross's goose (3), piping plover (2), western gull, least tern, loggerhead shrike (2), Townsend's solitaire, and Smith's longspur. If accepted, the gull would be a first state record, and the longspur the first in a dozen years.

The Reports follow the taxonomic order of the AOU Checklist of North American Birds (1998), including the 42nd (July 2000) and 43rd (July 2002) Supplements. Underlined names of species indicate those on the OBRC Review List; documentation is needed to add reports of these species to official state records, or to attributed records herein. When supplied, county names appear italicized. Unless numbers are specified, sightings refer to single birds. Abbreviations, conventions, and symbols used in the Reports should be readily understood, with the possible exceptions of the following: BCSP=Buck Creek SP in Clark; BIWA=Big Island WA in Marion; BSBO=Black Swamp Bird Observatory; CPNWR=Cedar Point NWR in Lucas; CPNWRc=monthly CPNWR census; CVNP=Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Cuyahoga and Summit; Dike 14=Gordon Park impoundment in Cleveland; EFSP=East Fork SP in Clermont; EHSP=East Harbor SP in Ottawa; cop=end of the period, in this case 31 May 2003; fide=in trust of; said of data conveyed on behalf of another person; GLSM=Grand Lake St. Marys in Auglaize and Mercer; HBSP=Headlands Beach SP in Lake;
**Spring 2003 Reports**

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**Red-throated Loon**: Perhaps a single bird was involved at Eastlake 28 Feb and 2 Mar (C. Holt) through 22 Mar (K. Metcalf, m obs.). J. Fry saw one at Lk Logan, Hocking 21 Mar, and S. Zadar another at E. 72nd St in Cleveland 14 Apr.

**Common Loon**: One cruised Newell's Run in Washington as early as 1 Mar (B. Placier). An astonishing 611 flew by LSR 5 Apr (J. Pogačnik), an all-time spring record. At least seven persisted into May, with birds in alternate plumage 17 May at Hoover Res (C. Bombaci) and 26 May at Lake Su An WA in Williams (J. Grabmeier).

**Pied-billed Grebe**: One was at Lk Rockwell 1 Mar (B. Bolon), seven in the Great Miami R in Butler 2 Mar (M. Busam), and 20 at Camp Dennison in Hamilton 16 Mar (B. Hoppe). P. Lozano noted a female with three downy young 27 May at Sandy Ridge MP.

**Horned Grebe**: Present from 1 Mar (Avon Lake, J. Brunfield) through 15 May (near Wooster, S. Snyder). An unusually high count was 50 at BCSP 23 Mar (D. Overacker).

**Red-necked Grebe**: The past winter's only red-necked grebe staged a remarkable stay at Camp Dennison in Hamilton 4-12 Jan. During the first week of the spring season, however, it became clear we were to witness a major influx reminiscent of the spring of 1994's. Rob Harlan treated that event in these pages (17(3):75-79) in detail, estimating 100+ individual birds statewide during the period 1 Feb-9 May 1994, based on reports from 24 counties. The high count of 28 birds came from Newell's Run in Washington on 14 Feb 1994.

This spring, an estimated 190+ individuals were reported, from at least 38 Ohio counties (Allen [1 bird], Athens [3], Auglaize [1], Butler [1], Clark [1], Clermont [1], Cuyahoga [5+], Delaware [1], Erie [1], Fulton [1], Geauga [1], Greene [3+], Guernsey [1], Hamilton [4+], Hocking [1], Huron [2], Jefferson [10+], Lake [89+], Licking [2], Lorain [18+], Lucas [5], Monroe [2], Montgomery [1], Morrow [2], Muskingum [1], Ottawa [1], Pickaway [2+], Portage [3], Preble [1], Richland [9], Ross [1], Scioto [1], Stark [2], Summit [2+], Trumbull [1], Washington [4], Wayne [4], and Wyandot [1]). The birds started showing up on the very first day of the season, with one in Newell's Run in Washington (B. Placier) and 18 at Avon Lk PP (J. Brunfield). The highest count was 61 birds (L. Rosche, T. Beal), nr Eastlake PP 12 Mar. Later, the ONWRC had four breeding-plumaged birds 4 May, and S. Edinger the last two, one advanced in molt, in Athens 8 May.

In 2003 more observers were afield, and communications easier (60+ observers contributed to our 90+ reports), so comparisons as to the magnitudes of the incursions are difficult. In his summary, Harlan compared 1994's 100+ birds with only ~250 recorded in the entire previous history of Ohio ornithology, suggesting the 1994 phenomenon might have been unique at the time.
Since 1994, Podiceps grisegena reports remained fairly normal in Ohio, averaging fewer than two per winter season and fewer than five per spring—until 2003. Observers across the eastern US, south as far as the Carolinas, noted abnormally high numbers of red-necked grebes Feb-May this year.

On 28 Feb, 206 red-necked grebes appeared in the harbor at Dunkirk, NY, farther east along the Lake Erie shore. The next day only fifty were to be found, but that is the day they started to appear in Ohio. By 10 Mar, 717 grebes had been reported in 39 PA counties, and by 4 Apr in 52 counties for a total of ~900 birds. In some eastern US, a few grebes in full alternate plumage hung around well into May, and even into Jun. Ohio’s latest report came from 8 May, just a day earlier than that of 1994. Unlike in 1994, we had no reports of grebes grounded by severe weather, only birds taking advantage of open Lk Erie water near power plants early on, then in larger rivers and reservoirs, sometimes in small ponds and quarries, after the general thaw. After warm temperatures dominated —mid-Mar, most records were of single birds in inland counties, with a high count of only three at one location (Greene, 5 Apr, S. Reeves).

The most often heard explanation (see, for example Field Notes 48(2):173) for these periodic incursions posits the displacement of wintering grebes from the Great Lakes by ice. This hypothesis needs more testing. There is no direct evidence that red-necked grebes winter far offshore in the Great Lakes. Nor do we (at least in Ohio) have data that correlate the presence of abnormally large numbers of red-necked grebes with each and every freeze-up. Surely 1994 and 2003 are not the only years in which some of the Great Lakes largely froze over, where are comparable records for grebe incursions in other years? Do the five published Ohio records of red-necked grebe for 1934, or the sixteen birds reported in 1959—both memorably cold winters—document under-observed major incursions?

There is another intriguing theory, which Alan Worthington calls “two-tier migration.” Applied to the red-necked grebe, it envisions birds migrating from wintering grounds in the Atlantic to the lower Great Lakes early, from mid-February to late March. Here they tarry long enough to build up fat deposits and attain alternate plumage, then resume migration in time to take advantage of the thaw on the breeding grounds in late April through May. Worthington describes red-throated loons and horned grebes as employing similar but not identical strategies in the Great Lakes. Other Canadian observers say southbound grebes in fall may stop and stage to fatten and molt in Georgian Bay in August and September before resuming their southeasterly route (similar to that of tundra swans) to the Atlantic coast. Under the “two-tier” hypothesis, this spring’s grebes arrived to find their customary Lake Erie staging areas choked with ice, and improvised by staging temporarily on open water until Lake waters opened in mid-March, with stragglers through the remainder of the period.

Eared Grebe: One visited Avon Lk PP 14 (V. Fazio) and another at Thurston SP (Henry) 15 Mar (P. Chad). One spent 29 Mar (R. Hakim/Eile H. Petruschke) through 16 Apr (L. Rosche) at Fairport Hbr. Birds in alternate plumage were seen at Kelleys Isl 14 May (Rosche) and 16 May at Funk Bottoms (E. Schlabach). American White Pelican: A couple of pelicans. Three at BCSP 8 Mar (D. Overacker) grew to four 27 Mar (T. Shively) and two remaining 29 Mar (B. Heck). Four were in Higgensport, Brown on 17 (L. Brumbaugh). Mar (C. Clingman). J. Holbrook (J. J. McCormae) had two at Rocky Fk SP, Highland on 24 Mar, and Z. Allen four.

Rocky Fork State Park in Highland County hosted these four American white pelicans for several days. Digiscoped photo by Jay Lehman on 27 March 2003.

There later that day, which remained 29 Mar (B. Whan). Simultaneously, four were found at Caesar Ck SP 29 (J. Wof, S. Reeves)-31 Mar (N. Smith). Two touched down at La Due Res 30 Mar (L. Rosche). A young bird found at HWA 13 Apr (R. Mispon) remained through the period (m). S. Wright saw seven in maneuvers over Sandusky Bay on 28 Apr. A bird seen passing Burke Airport in Cleveland (R. White) 15 May perhaps was the one that floated in the channel away from Pipe Creek W 2015 (S. Young) through 18 May (G. Leidy). Two sailed over Sandusky Bay 23 May (S. Zadar), with a duo, perhaps the same, on ONWR 26 May (L. Gardella).

Double-crested Cormorant: Canadian biologists estimate ~200,000 nesting in the Great Lakes. In 1990 none had re-established successful nesting in Ohio, but by last year 2787 pairs were at ONWR’s West Sister Isl, with smaller numbers at Turning Pt Isi in Sandusky and even fewer at GLSM. Non-breeders appeared at many reservoirs.

American Bittern: Reported at MWW 30 Mar-12 Apr (two, F. Frick) and at SVWA 16 (J. Shrader) 22 Apr (L. Gara). At Magee 22 Mar (J. Anderson) through at least 8 May (E. Salvey), three at Mallard Club Marsh WA 8 May (B. Morrison), at PCWA 11 (A. Chad) and 19 May (D. Sanders), and two for the CPNWR 12 May. Seen at Sandy Ridge MP in Lorain 25 Apr (M. Stetz)-17 May (C. Caldwell).

Least Bittern: Reported at the customary spots, with two on the 12 May CPNWR, one 18 May at Lorain (G. Leidy), two at Magee and singles at PCWA 19 May (R&S Harlan) and SVWA 22 May (B. Powell).

Great Egret: Early were birds at Rte 2 and the Portage R 17 Mar (R&S Harlan), at Cowan Lk SP 22 Mar (C. Becker), and at Shreve Lk 23 Mar (S. Snyder). Apparent non-breeders or deadbeat parents were at Mosquito Lk WA 26 May (D. Hochadel) and in Paulding the “end of May” (D&M Dunakin).

Sauroy Egret: Seen as early as 15 Apr at Magee, with a peak there of five 28 Apr (both V. Fazio). Elsewhere, one was in Portsmouth 20 Apr (B. Sparks), one in Athens 22 Apr (B. Placer) with two there 8 May (S. Edinger), one at SVWA the same day (D. Johnson), and one at Ptnire Oaks MP in Madison 23 May (J. Fry).


Tricolored Heron: Details of a 16 Apr report from Cayahoga are with the OBRC. One from 24 Apr at Newell’s Run backwater in Washington was described, including photo, for the OBRC as well.

Cattle Egret: A migrant was in Stark 5 Apr (C. Fenstermaker). Sandusky roosters were often spotted in the area, such as 23 on 12 May (K. Mock). More unusual were 14 May birds at LSR (J. Pogacnik) and at Gilmore Ponds, Butler (B. Lackner).

Green Heron: Arrived on schedule 17 Apr in Hardin (E. McElroy) and at Walborn Res (B. Morrison), and the 19th near Killbuck (S. Snyder) and at SVWA (S. Reeves).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: P. Zanlazo’s auscious monitoring of the Merrvin St roost in Cleveland yielded 10 birds on 10 Mar, 39 on 3/27, 44 on 3/29, 92 on 3/30, 93 on 1 Apr, 99 on 4/3, 154 on 4/5, 140 on 4/6, 166 on 4/7, 175 on 4/8, 180 on 4/9, 230 on 4/10, 165 on 4/11, 122 on 4/15, and 68 on 4/24. Elsewhere, of interest were 15 at PCWA 18 May (J. Hammond) and two in Williams 26 May (J. Grabmeier).

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron: Once again reported only from Columbus, where birds arrived 26 Mar, with four adults and four nestlings by the hop (A. Paschall).

Glossy Ibis: A breeding-plumaged adult was reported feeding close to a road just south of Apple Creek in Wayne 16 May; details are with the OBRC.
White-faced Ibis: On 17 May an alternate-plumaged bird was seen skulking at PCWA, where it was refound 19 May. Details are with the OBRC.

Black Vulture: S. Corbo counted 75 over Camp Dennison, Hamilton 1 Mar, and L.E. Yoder two in Coshohocton 8 Mar. On 17 Mar 200+ soared in Clermont (L. Brumbaugh). April sightings included one in Ross the 9th (J. McMahon), 22 in Shawnee SF the 19th (J. Shirader), and 35+ near Clear Ck MP in Hocking 21 Apr (B. Royse).

Turkey Vulture: Certainly migrants were one in Columbus 7 Mar (R. Royse), and two in Summit 9 Mar (K. Mock). V. Fazio reported good numbers of 214 at Magee on 17 Mar, 747 at MBSP the following day, and 587 at Magee 24 Mar.

Greater White-fronted Goose: Reports came of five at Camp Dennison 1 Mar (S. Corbo), one at Gilmore Ponds 8 Mar (A. Oliver), one at N. Chagrin Res (K. Metcalf) 12 Mar, one 18-20 Mar near Wooster (S. Snyder), and one in Manigua Twp, Portage 19 Mar (L. Rosche).

Snow Goose: The ONWR tallied 29 (15 blue) over-wintering birds 2 Mar, and a flock of 35 on 17 Mar at Magee (V. Fazio) may have been the same one. Thirty-two were scattered across the state in ones and twos (in Franklin, Clinton, Adams, Clermont, Clark, Scioto, Lake, Preble) the first half of Mar, the latest report came from BIWA, a single bird 20 Apr (C. Bombaci). High count of transients five in Ross 9 Mar (J. McCormac).

Ross’s Goose: Two visited HWSP 7-9 Mar (D. Russell), accepted OBRC. For one at Lks Pippen and Rockwell in Portage 18-20 Mar (ph details) are with the OBRC.

Tundra Swan: Migration continued through Mar, with over 5200 reported in the migratory path ESE through the northern part of the state during the period. High count ~500 Funk Bottoms 17 Mar (B. Burnett). The only Apr report, of 122 birds, came from the wintering area by the ONWR.

Whooper Swan: One visited Hebron Fish Hatchery in Licking 16 Apr (ph J. Stafford). Though the bird appeared wary and showed no obvious signs of captivity, chances of wild origin are likely close to zero. Details are with the OBRC.

Wood Duck: None reported wintering, so 16 in Dayton 7 Mar may have been first arrivals (N. Smith). Birds appeared the same day in the Cleveland area (K. Metcalf).

Cuyahoga County’s North Chagrin Reservation hosted this greater white-fronted goose on 12 March 2003. Photo by Gary Messaros.

Causing quite a bit of surprise, this whooper swan appeared at the Hebron Fish Hatchery on 16 April 2003. Photo by Jim Stafford.
Harlequin Duck: A female discovered 2 Mar at Eastlake (C. Holt) remained through 8 Mar (H. Petruschke, m obs).

Surf Scoter: Twenty-two reported, with one at Avon Lk FP 1 Mar (J. Bramfield) and the latest 18 May at LSR (J. Pogacnik). Records in Lorain, Cuyahoga, Lake, Licking, Franklin, Ottawa, and Portage. High count five at LaDue Res 28 Apr (C. Holt).


Long-tailed Duck: Sixteen reported, from Trumbull, Lake, Cuyahoga, and Allen. First reported were in Mosquito Lk 9 Mar (D. Hochadel), the male a resident at Bresler Res near Lima 25 Apr (D. Dister). High count five at LSR 30 Mar (J. Pogacnik).

Bufflehead: Larger counts 100+ in Cuyahoga 6 Mar (L. Gardella), 110 at Eastlake 12 Mar (L. Rosche), and 352 near Kelley's Isl 18 Apr (T. Bartlett). Latest reported was a lone drake at ONWR 10 May (J. Hammond, m obs).

Common Goldeneye: A few wintered south, and were found into the period. At Eastlake 220 were present 12 Mar (L. Rosche), and ~130 at Avon Lk PP 16 Mar (C. Warren). Three remained off Kelley's Isl 18 Apr (T. Bartlett) and one off LSR 11 May (J. Pogacnik).

Hooded Merganser: No large numbers reported, with 40 at EFSP 7 Mar (H. Armstrong). Females with young were at Killbuck 17 May–oep (S. Snyder), and three with 24+ young at ONWR 28 May (F. Lozano).

Common Merganser: One remained as late as 30 Apr at EHSP (G. Links).

Red-breasted Merganser: At LSR, 3480 passed 23 Mar, then 143 on 11 May (J. Pogacnik). Other May records came from Shreve Lk the 5th (S. Snyder), 30–40 near Kelleys Isl the 16th (K. Metcalf), 18 the 18th at LSR (Pogacnik), the 24th at BCSP (D. Overacker), and a female at Hinckley Lk, Medina 28 May (R&S Harlan).

Ruddy Duck: Twenty-plus were at EFSP 5 Mar (H. Armstrong). S. Zadar had 200+ at Lk Medina 19 Apr, H&S Hiris 1434 at Magee 20 Apr, and L. Rosche 300 at Mogadore Res 27 Apr. The 4 May ONWR had 47, S. Snyder an alt male at Shreve Lk 21 May, F. Frieck 2 at MWW 24 May, and P. Lozano 11 at Sandy Ridge MP 27 May.

Osprey: The ODOW reintroduction project has already exceeded its 2010 project goals, with 22 nests and 31+ nestlings this spring. Ospreys established three new nests, in Delaware, Mahoning, and Tuscarawas. Interestingly, the success of Ohio’s project is increasingly due to infusions of apparently wild (or at least unmarked) birds; only 10 of the current 22 nests involve marked birds (D. Sherman). A similar project was launched this year to re-establish the species in Indiana.

Bald Eagle: ODOW monitors counted 88 Ohio nests, 59 of them successful, and 105 young surviving 24 wks. Noted were 12 new pairs, the southernmost in Morgan.

Northern Harrier: High count of migrants 13 at MBSP 15 Mar (E. Schlabach). Of interest during breeding season were a male in Marion 30 Apr (B. Whan), one at Dike 14 and one at HBSP on 10 May (both G. Leidy), a pair constructing a nest at Mosquito Lk WA 26 May (D. Hochadel), and single individuals on 31 May in Gallia (J. Fuller) and Coshocton (L. Delinger).

Northern Goshawk: An ad was at LSR 24 Mar (J. Pogacnik), when another was at Magee (V. Fazio). B. Morrison observed one in Stark 2 Apr.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Healthy. At MBSP 86 passed over on 15 Mar (E. Schlabach). Seven were in the air at once over CVNP the same day (D. Chasar).

Broad-winged Hawk: Moved on schedule. One was in Shawnee SF 15 Apr (B. Royse), and one in Portage 18 Apr (B. Bolton). E. Schlabach counted 116 over Holmes on 19 Apr, and B. Murphy 153 over Lakewood 20 Apr. On 28 Apr, V. Fazio tallied 313 over Magee, with a single kite of 277 birds.

Red-tailed Hawk: Single dark morphs passed over MBSP 18 Mar and Magee on 28 Apr (V. Fazio). An 80% albino nested near Walborn Res during the period (B. Morrison).

Rough-legged Hawk: High count six at The Wilds, Muskingum 10 Mar (L. Brumbaugh). The latest to depart was at KPWA 26 Mar (R. Semper).

Golden Eagle: Wintertime birds at The Wilds consisted of an ad and two imm (15 Mar, B. Conlon), where the last sighting was of an ad and an imm 20 Mar (J. Benetiett et al.). Migrants spied included an ad at MBSP 15 Mar (E. Schlabach), an imm in Lake 14 Apr (D. Semman), an ad in NW Conotton 19 Apr (L.E. Yoder), and an imm at Magee 21 Apr and a sub-ad there 28 Apr (V. Fazio).

Merlin: Twenty-nine reported. As many as four were observed at Calvary Cem in Cuyahoga, with a tercel apparently wintering 11 Dec through 31 Mar (L. Gardella, m obs). The latest report came from Mallard Club Marsh WA on 13 May (L. Rosche).
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Peregrine Falcon: The ODW introduction project reported 12 successful nests, with 30 young banded statewide. New field mark: an ad with a satellite antenna attached to its back was flying west along the shore at ONWR 30 Apr (P. Rodewald).

King Rail: Few reports. The CPMNWR found one as late as 15 May (G. Links).

Virginia Rail: As expected. Wintering birds at SVWA numbered 2-3 on 16 Mar (L. Theriault).

Sora: First noted at MWW 5 Apr (F. Frick), seven were at SVWA 17 Apr (J. Shadrak).

Common Moorhen: Three at Magee 20 Apr grew to seven 18 May (H&S Hiris) and two at Killbuck 21 Apr to four 14 May (S. Snyder). Five BIWA 9 May (D. Horn). High count seven 4 May ONWR. One was seen at Mosquito Lk 30 May (D. Hochadel).

American Coot: Fifteen toughed it out at Avon Lk (J. Brumfield) and 150-200 at Camp Dennison in Hamilton (S. Corbo), both on 1 Mar. High count 2600+ BIWA 17 Apr (V. Fazio).

Sandhill Crane: ~250 reported, mostly in Mar in the western counties. As many as four were reportedly from the NW marshes 28 Apr (V. Fazio) through 19 May (R&S Harlan, m obs). Seven the maximum reported from the Killbuck area 5 Apr (S. Snyder), with several through the end of May. With a frequent duo in Mahoning 17 May (B. Jones).

Black-bellied Plover: Two arrived at ONWR 17 Apr (E. Salvey), and four appeared in ones and twos through 26 May (Wyandot, R. Counts), with two large concentrations noted in Lucas: 115 over Whitehouse 10 May (M. Anderson), and ~150 in a Twerp field 17 May (D. Russell).

American Golden-Plover: A good flight began on 27 Mar with four at KPWA (V. Fazio) and ended 3 May with 15 between Columbus and SVWA (J. Hammad). In the interim, reports came of 7500+ birds in fields in western counties, the high count a near-record ~4100 in Marion on 23 Apr (M. Bolton).

Semipalmated Plover: First two in Scioto 26 Apr (B. Whan), the last six at SVWA 30 May (S. Reeves). High count ~100 at PCWA 15 May (G. Links).

Piping Plover: Two were photographed 3 May along the beach at Magee WA; details are with the OBRC.

American Avocet: Only two, at Paulding Res 29 Apr (D&M Dunakin).

Greater Yellowlegs: Quite early was one 3 Mar on the Little Miami floodplain (S. Hedeen). Ninety at Funk 14 Apr (S. Snyder) was a good count, though short of the highest of 120 at BIWA 23 Apr (M. Bolton).

Lesser Yellowlegs: Earliest were 14 at BCPWA 16 Mar (E. Suvely). Many double-figure reports ensued in Apr, the highest of 80 at BIWA on the 23rd (M. Bolton). J. Yochum reported one in Williams as late as 30 May.

Solitary Sandpiper: Early was one in Pike 3 Apr (P. Whan). On 29 Apr 22 gathered at Gilmore Ponds (S. Reeves) and 22 at Killbuck 4 May (G. Miller), with 20 counted on the ONWR of the latter date. Last seen at Sandy Ridge MP in Lorain 27 May (P. Lozano).

Willet: A remarkable 25 reported, an even more remarkable 15 of them inland. One Scioto 26 (B. Sparks)-29 Apr (B. Royse), two Lk Logan in Hocking 2 May with one there 6 May (J. Fry), two in Twerp Lucas 7 (C. Tucker)-8 May (P. Rodewald), one at Magee 9 May (S. Snyder), two at Lorain 11 May (J. Pugacnik), one m Medusa Marsh 11 (D. Linzel)-14 May (G. Links), nine (S. Reeves) then 11 (L. Gara) at Caesar Ck SP 12 May, three at Magee 14 (T. Simmons)-16 May (R. Nirschl), one at HWSP 15 May (C. Butrus), and one at Conneaut 21 May (J. Sedransk).

Spotted Sandpiper: Early at EFSP 30 Mar (B. Stanley). High 13 at Cowan Lk SP 3 May (L. Gara).

SPRING 2003 REPORTS

Upland Sandpiper: Two pairs were seen in fields in Jerusalem Twp, Lucas through the period (G. Links, m obs). C. Holt reported a May pair in Dorsett Twp, Ashbalia.

Whimbrel: Fly-by reports came from Lorain (G. Leidy, 18 May), from LSR (11 birds, J. Pugacnik, 26 May), and from Crane Ck SP beach 26 May (C. Caldwell).

Hudsonian Godwit: A rare spring migrant, a female was along the entry road at ONWR 4 May (L. Gardella, m obs).

Ruddy Turnstone: Two were at Funk 12 May (S. Snyder). About 100 worked a Jerusalem Twp field 17 May (D. Russell), and "hundreds" the Crane Ck SP beach for the midge hatch 24 May (R. Nirschl), with 45 remaining the 28th (P. Lozano).

Red Knot: One was at Conneaut 12-13 May (C. Holt). Another joined flocks of dunlins for the Magee midge festa 24 (R. Nirschl) to 26 May (L. Gardella).

Sanderling: Sparse as expected, with singles at HBSP 20 May (L. Rosche), among the flocks at Magee 25 May (D. Sanders), and 30 May in Williams (J. Yochum).

Semipalmated Sandpiper: Late, with scanty numbers. One was at SVWA 18 May (S. Reeves), and the high count only 17 in Williams 30 May (J. Yochum).

Western Sandpiper: R. Counts found one at a reservoir near Upper Sandusky 25 May.

Least Sandpiper: Two at BCSP 1 Mar (C. Buechele) could only have wintered at this traditional location. Migrants were at Turtle Ck by 28 Mar (V. Fazio), but mudflats were hard to find. High count ~150 in Williams, of all places (J. Yochum, 15 May), and two lingered through 30 May at SVWA (S. Reeves).

White-rumped Sandpiper: First report from SVWA 4 May (J. Stenger). One was at Conneaut 12-13 May (C. Holt). A couple isolated the mudflats at Pipe Ck WA 16 (E. Schlabach) through 25 May (D. Sanders). On 20 May J. Fry had one at Pickerington Ponds, Franklin. Found in small numbers through the rest of the period.

Pectoral Sandpiper: Damp fields were plentiful, as were pectorals. Over 18,000 birds reported, with four four-figure and 23 three-figure counts. First were 25+ at SVWA 14 Mar (S. Reeves), with high counts of ~1100 in on Wyandot 11 Apr (R. Counts) and at BIWA of ~6100 on 23 and ~2100 on 27 Apr (both M. Bolton).

Dunlin: First reported early by the 6 Apr ONWR, where 2097 later found a sliver of habitat 28 Apr (S. Zadar). Elsewhere often seen in bewildered flocks overhead looking for a place to dine. ~2000 dominated the midge-maddened throes at Magee 24 May (R. Nirschl), actually venturing by the hundreds into the busy parking lot 25 May (P. Gardner). On 30 May 17 lingered at SVWA (S. Reeves).

Stilt Sandpiper: Always scarce in spring, two in nuptial finery tailed in Wayne 17 (S. Snyder, ph) through 22 May (E. Suvely).

Short-billed Dowitcher: High count ~150 nr Bryan in Williams 15 May (J. Yochum). First at KPWA 30 Apr (J. Hammad), the latest nr Upper Sandusky (R. Counts) 26 May. One at ONWR 25 May (D. Sanders) was the only report from the w. Lake Erie marshes. Among fewer than 30 others inland, high counts were 15 at Funk 14 May (E. Schlabach) and five in Mahoning 17 May (B. Jones).

Long-billed Dowitcher: Rare in spring, one at SVWA on 10 Apr lacked orange tones below, but had fresh scapulars and wing coverts (S. Reeves).

Wilson’s Snipe: One 3 Mar in Hamilton may have over-wintered (S. Hedeen). Twenty migrants were in Scioto 15 Mar (B. Sparks), 25 in Oxford 11 Apr (D. Ressell), and 41 in Mathias Twp in Portage 13 Apr (L. Rosche) for the high count. D. Hochadel noted courtship flights as early as 23 Mar in Trumbull, with 15 flushed from meadows 27 Apr.

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American Woodcock: First noted 1 Mar (C. Bedel from P. Whan) in Adams, eight were at Gilmore Ponds 4 Mar (M. Busam). High 10 at Jatke, CVNP 16 Mar (D. Chasar).

Wilson’s Phalarope: An ad female was at SVWA 7 May (S. Reeves). Two were at the Funk Bottoms 14 May (E. Schlabach), three near Bryan in Williams 15 May (J. Yochum), and one at Pipe Ck WA on 27 May (M. Warren).

Red-necked Phalarope: A female was in a Williams wetland 19-22 May (J. Yochum), three (two females) at Pipe Ck WA 23 May (D. Linsell), a female at Funk Bottoms 23 May (S. Snyder), and a female and a male near Upper Sandusky 26 May (R. Counts).

Laughing Gull: An ad was at Lorain 5 Apr (J. Pogacnik), another at BIWA 17 Apr (V. Fazio), another in Hebron, Licking 9-10 May (C. Dusthimer), and yet another near Toussaint WA 17 May (E. Durbin from G. Links).

Franklin’s Gull: An ad with pinkish underparts was at the GLSM fish hatchery 22 Apr (M. Mislon).

Little Gull: The first open water at LSR brought an ad 22 Mar (J. Pogacnik), then perhaps the same to HBSP 23 Mar (L. Rosche). LSR hosted another 19 Apr (Pogacnik).

Bonaparte’s Gull: K. McDonald spotted one in Hamilton 7 Mar, D. Overacker six at BCSP the following day, and by the 28th V. Fazio 600+ at Magee. J. Pogacnik counted 10,880 passing LSR 19 Apr. Two remained at PCWA 18 May (J. Hammond).

Thayer’s Gull: On 1 Mar J. Pogacnik had a first-year, a third-year, and an ad at E. 72 St in Cleveland, variably seen by other observers over the next few days. L. Rosche found one at HBSP 6 Apr, and Pogacnik an ad at LSR as late as 26 Apr.

Iceland Gull: On 1 Mar J. Brunfield picked out two at Avon Lake PP, and J. Pogacnik 8-10 at E. 72nd St in Cleveland. L. Rosche found four at HBSP 3 Mar. Pogacnik noted a single bird at LSR 2 Mar, and Rosche one remaining at E. 72nd St 7 Mar.

Ashtabula County’s Conneaut harbor hosted numerous terns this spring. This Forster’s tern was photographed there by Gary Meszaros on 15 May 2003.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Two were at E. 72nd St on 1 Mar (J. Pogacnik) and one on the 22nd (K. Metealf). One was inland at La Due Res 30 Mar (L. Rosche). May birds included one at Lorain on the 11th (J. Pogacnik) and at Conneaut on the 12th (C. Holt).

Western Gull: Reported as this species, a second-winter bird at E. 72nd St in Cleveland was well photographed at close range 1 Mar. What was apparently the same individual was observed at Avon Lk PP 11 Mar. Details are with the OBRC.

Glaucous Gull: Six were counted at E. 72nd St and six at Avon Lk on 1 Mar (J. Pogacnik). Fifteen other reports (mobs) ensued along the Lakefront, with the final sighting an adult on 3 May at LSR (Pogacnik).

Great Black-backed Gull: High spring count 150 at Avon Lk 1 Mar (J. Pogacnik).

Black-legged Kittiwake: Very rare in spring, an imm was at LSR 19 Apr (J. Pogacnik).

Caspian Tern: First three reported at Rocky Fork SP 29 Mar (J. Lennon), one was in Cleveland the next day (C. Spagnoli). High count 119 at LSR 19 Apr (J. Pogacnik) and 62 was a noteworthy number as late as 12 May at Conneaut (C. Holt).

Common Tern: Small numbers were off the Crane Ck SP beach as early as 25 Apr (V. Fazio). Inland, 26 were seen nr Wooster on 16 May (S. Snyder).

Forster’s Tern: First noted 6 Apr near Wapakoneta (J. Hammond) and in Cleveland (S. Zadar), migrants passed through mid-May. Unusual numbers from the northeast included 50 at HBSP on 8 May (L. Rosche) and 174 at Conneaut 12 May (C. Holt).

Least Tern: An adult in alternate plumage was reported from Metzger in Lucas on 17 May; details are with the OBRC.

Black Tern: Only twenty-four reported, nineteen from inland spots, ranging in time from 8 (Paulding, D&M Dunakin) to 30 May (Williams, J. Yochum). High count only three, at KPWA 17 May (R. Sempler).

Black-billed Cuckoo: First at Spring Grove Cem in Cincinnati 4 May (J. Stenger), with eight more arrivals reported in the ensuing week as far north as Magee.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: First reported at Scioto Tr SF 27 Apr (B. Roysce).

Barn Owl: On 4 May, at least nine pairs were known to be incubating eggs at nests in Wayne, Holmes, and Tuscarawas (G. Miller).

Long-eared Owl: KPWA birds lasted until 25 Mar (R. Sempler), but one in Wayne persisted from mid-winter through 14 Apr (Paulding, S. Snyder). S. Zadar noticed one at Dike 14 in Cleveland 15 Mar. A migrant was at HDSNP 19 Apr (H. Petruschke). One found caught in barbed wire in Clermont 22 Apr was later released (G. Fantetti).

Short-eared Owl: Rodent numbers were low at KPWA this winter, where the last owl was seen 2 Mar (M. Kraus). One was at the VOA property in Butler 12 Mar (J. Brown). On 19 Apr, S. Zadar spotted one at Dike 14, and H. Petruschke another at HDSNP.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: One at KPWA lasted through 8 Mar (S&R Harlan), and the Gilmore Ponds bird from the winter was reported through 11 Mar (L. Theriault). One was at Magee 24 Mar (R. Nirschl), and one at Dike 14 in Cleveland 3 Apr (S. Zadar).

Common Nighthawk: First appeared over Cincinnati 29 Apr (W. Hull), where 45 were around by 8 May (J. Brown). Alarmingly absent in many traditional urban haunts.

Chuck-will’s-widow: First Adams report 20 Apr (J. Lehman). Only one reappeared in Hocking, singing south of the previous stronghold 7 May (P. Knoop from J. Fry).
Whip-poor-will: First heard were several in Scioto 11 Apr (Z. Allen). P. Rodewald recorded whips at ONWR 1 May, at Crane Ck SP 10 May, and at CPNWR 20 May.

Chimney Swift: Two were seen in NE Holmes on 15 Apr (E.A. Yoder) for the first. By the 27th, “thousands” were over Portsmouth (B. Royse).

Ruby-throated Hummingbird: First seen 20 Apr, in Clermont (F. Kidd) and Hamilton (J. Watkins).

Yellow-bellied Sapucker: One in Clear Ck MP 20-21 Mar (J. Watts) may have, and two in Columbus 26 Mar (R. Thorn) probably had, over-wintered. Fifteen to 20 migrants were at Magee 4 Apr (G. Links). One lingered on 10 May there (D. Horn).

Olive-sided Flycatcher: On the early side was one at ONWR 9 May (B. Morrison et al.). Numbers peaked with three birds reported around the state on 22 May, the last report coming from Winton Wds in Hamilton the following day (S. Corbo).

Eastern Wood-Pewee: Early arrivals came to Franklin 20 Apr (R. Thorn), Hamilton 27 Apr (J. Sienger), Parma 28 Apr (G. Leidy), and Scioto Trail SF 30 Apr (B. Royse).

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: In no hurry, the first was netted by BSBO at Navarre Marsh 10 May, but they were customarily plentiful thereafter through the period.

Acadian Flycatcher: Arrived 3 May, at BCSP (D. Overacker) and MWW (A. Oliver).

Alder Flycatcher: First reported in Pickaway 13 May (G. Miller). Territorial birds were at Hinckley MP in Medina 27-28 May (R.S. Harlan) and two-three at Irwin Prairie SNP in Lucas 28 May (G. Links); on 30 May, two were at Shenango WA and five at Mosquito Lk WA in Trumbull (D. Hochadel).

Willow Flycatcher: A calling bird was first at Irwin Prairie SNP on 9 May (G. Miller et al.); by the following day, there were to be found on the CVNP (D. Chasar).

Least Flycatcher: D. Morse discovered the earliest migrant 18 Apr in Clermont, and the high count was 20 on 16 May at Magee (E. Schlabaeh).

Eastern Phoebe: Though over-wintering was not confirmed this year, this durable species was first reported from Hocking 4 Mar (J. Fry).

Great Crested Flycatcher: First touchdowns were recorded on 20 Apr, in Spring Grove Cem in Cincinnati (N. Cade) and at LSR in Lake (J. Pogacnik).

Eastern Kingbird: A bird in Butler 16 Apr (M. Busam) was eariyish. The high count was a swarm of 43 at LSR in Lake 11 May (J. Pogacnik).

Loggerhead Shrike: A duo was reported from Adams 9 May, and nesting verified 13 May; details including photos are with the OBRC.

Northern Shrike: The latest in the NE hunted Ashutula 23 Mar (J. Pogacnik). A bird at Spencer Lk WA, Medina was faithful through 16 Mar (R&S Harlan). One reported at Magee 3 Apr (N. Bixler) and at Crane Ck SP 4 Apr (A. Spencer).

White-eyed Vireo: First seen at Shawnee SF 15 Apr (B. Royse).

Bell’s Vireo: One was at MWW 3 May (H. Armstrong), D. Overacker found two pairs near one another in a traditional location at BCSP on 16 May, and another singing male at a different BCSP location 30 May. S. Richards discovered a singing male at park in Hilliard, Franklin 18 May; it remained through at least 27 May (J. Mearsa).

Yellow-throated Vireo: Arrived Scioto 15 Apr (B. Royse) and Magee 19 Apr (C. Caldwell).

Blue-headed Vireo: Heard and seen was a possible earliest-record male at Girtled Rd Resn in Lake 28 Mar (J. Pogacnik), an apparent overflyer. Another early individual was at Shawnee SF on 5 Apr (B. Sparks).

Warbling Vireo: Early arrival at Gilmore Ponds 18 Apr (M. Busam), and by 7 May 10+ were to be seen in Columbus (R. Thorn).

Philadelphia Vireo: First reported from Columbus 8 May (J. Glover), by 20 May six were netted at Navarre Marsh (BSBO), with three in Columbus 24 May (P. Rodewald).

Red-eyed Vireo: Appeared Shawnee 15 Apr, where 161 were counted 28 Apr (B. Royse).

Blue Jay: Seventy at EFSP 7 Mar were of interest (N. Cade). J. Pogacnik had 511 at LSR in Lake 11 May, then “several hundred” as late as 24 May. Magee observers during mid-May reported many migrant jays, most often paradoxically eastbound.
American Crow: If their numbers were reduced by WNV, they are bouncing back; R. Thorn reported “low numbers, but quite a few pairs, including many with 1-2 juveniles.”

Purple Martin: Early scouts arriving during favorable weather included one at Winton Wds, Hamilton (S. Corbo) 21 Mar, and two in Fairfield 3 Apr (J. Fray).

Tree Swallow: Showed up first on 9 Mar, with two in Scioto (J. McCormae) and one in Hamilton (S. Reeves).

Northern Rough-winged Swallow: J. Brumfield saw one in Wayne 22 Mar, T. Bartlett another 23 Mar in Seneca, and D. Drinkman two at MWW 25 Mar.

Bank Swallow: Cowan Lk SP hosted the first on 13 Apr (D. Unger). J. Pogacnik had 1092 at LSR on 11 May, by which time banks were spread across the Lk Erie shore.

Cliff Swallow: An apparent state record early arrival was a bird in Fredericksburg, Wayne 24 Mar (A.A. Tryer & E. Schlabach). More arrived 14 Apr in Holmes (W. Sarno), where P. Yoder’s 394 nests were down from last year’s 482. Nonetheless continued newly to colonize human structures statewide.


Red-breasted Nuthatch: Sparse. All reports: 2 Mar on the OWR, 9 Mar HWSP (E. Baumgardner et al.), 18 Apr Franklin (R. Thorn), 12 Apr at Columbus (B. Sparks), 13 Apr two nests under construction Brecksville Res (D. Chasar), two in the CVNP 10 May (L. Rosche), pair nesting Hocking Hills SP 19 May (F. Renrow), one at Hinckley MP, Medina 27 May (R&S Harlan).

Brown Creeper: First two migrants reported by G. Leidy at the CVNP 5 Apr, who had the high count of eight in Parma 9 Apr. D. Chasar noticed a nest under construction near Station Rd in the CVNP 4 May; S. Snyder had a bird at Killbuck 25 May, and J. Kuenzel another at Hoover Res 29 May.

Winter Wren: Probable migrants were in Hamilton 16 Mar (D. Brinkman), and two in Columbus 27 Mar (P. McSweeney). The BSBO captured one at Navarre Marsh 12 May.

Sedge Wren: The VOA property in Butler hosted one as early as 30 Apr, with six there 21 May (M. Basum). Singletons were detected at the SVWA 8 May (J. Perry), KPWA 16 May (G. Stauffer), and Funk Bottoms 17-30 May (S. Snyder); on 30 May, two others were in Berlin Res (B. Morrison).

Marsh Wren: Three were heard at SVWA 16 Apr (J. Shrader). The high count was only seven, at Magee 25 May (R&S Harlan).

Golden-crowned Kinglet: A high count of 55 came from Columbus 11 Apr (R. Roys), and persisted through 11 May at Lk Rockwell (L. Rosche). One was at the usual nesting area at Hinckley MP, Medina 28 May (R&S Harlan).

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Early at Magee 24 Mar (V. Fazio). On Kelley’s Isl, the 18 Apr census counted 80 (T. Bartlett). A straggler was at Magee 25 May (R&S Harlan).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: First detected in Clermont 30 Mar (N. Cade), their numbers had swelled to 126 in Scioto by 15 Apr (B. Roys).

Townsend’s Solitaire: One was discovered at the Shaker Lakes 4 Mar (L. Deininger), and seen by mols through at least 12 Mar (J. Lehman). The sixth accepted Ohio record.

Veerly: Late like most of the thrushes, first reported 1 May at Navarre (BSBO). Still, at times the only thrush seen at migrant traps, with 12+ at Magee 10 May (J. Brumfield).

Gray-cheeked Thrush: Must have largely overflown the state, as few were detected. One Sang at Gilmore Ponds 19 Apr (M. Basum) for an unusually early record. High count was only three, n of Columbus 15 May (P. Rodewald). Last seen Holmes 29 May (E. Schlabach).

Swainson’s Thrush: Apparent overflights occurred in Whitehouse, Lucas 20 Apr (M. Anderson) and at Navarre Marsh the following day (BSSO). Observed numbers were noticeably depressed, with a high count of 12+ at Magee 15 May (J. Brumfield).

Hermits Thrush: One was early, or had overwintered, in Zanesville 14 Mar (B. Whan). The BSBO netted one at Navarre 14 Apr, and by the 19th G. Leidy was to have 10 in Parma. High count 33 at Magee 28 Apr (V. Fazio).

Wood Thrush: Arrived 15 Apr in Shawnee SF (B. Roys), with a local record high count of 40 for the CVNP census of 10 May (D. Chasar).

Gray Catbird: One in Hocking 19 Mar could have overwintered (D. Horn), but one in Clermont 12 Apr was on a migrant’s schedule (D. Morse).

Northern Mockingbird: As usual, reported in greater numbers at higher latitudes each year, e.g., one unusual in n. Trumbull 19-20 Apr (D. Hochadel).

American Pipit: Some apparently over-wintered, but 50 at KPWA 26 Mar (R. Sempier) were migrants. At Hebron, Licking from six to 20 were regularly found 1 Mar through 17 May (C. Dusthimer), and one at HBSP the latter date (L. Rosche). High count 75+ in Tuscarawas 8 Apr (E. Schlabach).

Cedar Waxwing: Not reported widely until May this year. High count “hundreds” at Magee 25 May (R&S Harlan).

Blue-winged Warbler: Two arrived at Shawnee SF 14 Apr (R. Roys), and another was at Cowan Lk SP the following day (E. Roys). The CVNP census tallied a local record 128 on 10 May (D. Chasar).

Golden-winged Warbler: Thirty-two reported overall, from 29 Apr in Darke (S. Miller et al.) to the eop, with most 1-10 May. High count three 10 May CVNP (D. Chasar).

Hybrids of above: “Brewster’s” warblers—a bird at Magee (R. Nirschi) and a male banded at ONWR 1 May (P. Rodewald), one at Shaker Lakes 3-4 May (B. Finkelnstein), one in Holmes 8 May (M. Yoder & J. Walker), one banded at CVNP 8 May, then recaptured in breeding condition 16 May, with a different individual banded 23 May (G. Fowler), and one discovered in Perry 16 May (L. Andrews). “Lawrence”’s warblers—D. Johnson found one at Novak SNAP in Portage 6 May, then another there 19 May that persisted through 21 May (M. Tenney). One was in Parma 2-3 May (S. Zadar).
Tennessee Warbler: One at Magee 21 Apr was an early overflight (V. Fazio), as was one singing in Columbus 28 Apr (J. Kuenzli). Seventeen at Shawnee SF (B. Royse) on 30 Apr were still earlyish.

Orange-crowned Warbler: Often arrives earlier, but this year the first report came from 30 Apr in Hocking (J. Fry). The high count was of four birds banded at ONWR on the extraordinary migratory day of 10 May (P. Rodewald).

Nashville Warbler: Early reports came from Delaware 19 Apr (R. Thor), nw Coshocton 20 Apr (L.H. Yoder) and Navarre Marsh (BSBO) 22 Apr. High count 12 on 10 May in Tuscarawas (E. Schlabach).

Northern Parula: A singing male was repeatedly heard by two observers familiar with the species in Washington 28 Mar (H. Nagy). Another very early individual was in Adams 4 Apr (P. Wham). High count 10 at Magee 17 May (R&S Harlan).

Yellow Warbler: First reported from Shawnee SF 15 Apr (B. Royse), one had reached N. Chagrin Resn in Cuyahoga by 20 Apr (K. Metcalf). On 10 May, a total of 159 at the CVNP was a local record (fide D. Chasar).

Chesnut-sided Warbler: Two were in the Shawnee SF 30 Apr (B. Royse), and their numbers peaked on schedule, with a high count of 25 on 19 May at Magee (R&S Harlan), and a few remaining through the end.

Magnolia Warbler: Present as a migrant from 26 Apr at Shawnee Lookout in Hamilton (N. Cade) through the cusp, with a high count of 20 at Magee on 19 May (S&R Harlan). Likely staying to nest were three males at Conkle's Hollow on 19 May and another at Ash Cave (both in Hocking) on 20 May (both F. Renfrow).

Cape May Warbler: First reported in Wayne 4 May (G. Miller), last in Coshocton 24 May (E. Schlabach), numbers peaked at 10 on 11 May at Magee (R&S Harlan).

Black-throated Blue Warbler: 30 Apr brought one to Licking (T. Nickerson) and two to Scioto Trail SF (B. Royse). Ten were at HBSP on 20 May (L. Rosche).

The lower Shaker Lake area of Cuyahoga County produced this stunning golden-winged warbler in early May. Photo by Laura Gooch on 4 May 2003.

A "Brewster's" warbler joined the ranks at Cuyahoga County's lower Shaker Lake area this season. Photo by Laura Gooch on 4 May 2003.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: The ONWR racked up 173 on 4 May. On 16 May, five were still at Winton Wds, Hamilton (S. Reeves). The last spring record was a bird banded at Navarre by BSBO 28 May. A female of the western "Audubon's" race was found in Franklin 4 Apr, with details to the OBRC, and would be a fourth or fifth state record.

Black-throated Green Warbler: Exceptionally early was one photographed in Fairfield 28 Mar (T. Shelley fide M. England); three were in Shawnee SF 6 Apr (B. Royse). The CVNP census tallied a record 42 on 10 May (fide D. Chasar).

Blackburnian Warbler: The earliest to appear was at Metzger on 28 Apr (J. Sawvel fide V. Fazio). Three singing males at Conkle's Hollow in Hocking 19 May (F. Renfrow) were probably on territory.

Yellow-throated Warbler: Arrived in Ross 2 Apr (K. Sieg), in Adams 4 Apr (P. Wham), and way up in LSR on 14 Apr (J. Pegacnik). In Shawnee SF, 59 were present 14 Apr, and 82 on 15 Apr (B. Royse). One was a good find at Magee 11 May (R&S Harlan). D. Chasar discovered a nest near Station Rd. in the CVNP 15 May.

Pine Warbler: One was photographed at a suet feeder on a cold 7 Mar day in Adams (P. Wham), and it was not till 15 Mar at Shawnee SF that another was found (J. Hammond). High count 13 at Zaleski SF on 3 Apr (B. Royse).

Prairie Warbler: A possible early-record individual was heard and seen in Adams 22 Mar (P. Wham). Another was in Fairfield 28 Mar (T. Shelley fide M. England), and the high count came from Adams, as always—45 on 20 Apr (J. Lehman). Further north than most were one netted at Navarre Marsh 21 Apr (BSBO), one in Lucas 30 Apr (M. Anderson), and two in Columbiana 7 May (B. O'Toole).

Palm Warbler: Quite early was one at the CVNP 29 Mar (F. Dinkelbach). Peaked in early May, with 125 on the 4 May ONWR, and 60+ there 5 May (M. Bakermans fide P. Rodewald). Individuals of the much yellower eastern race D. p. hypochrysa were seen 20 Apr at LSR (J. Pegacnik) and banded at Navarre 22 Apr (BSBO).

Bay-breasted Warbler: Arrived a bit late across the northern counties 10 May, though a pioneer was in Franklin 1 May (R. Thor). High 20 at Magee 19 May (S&R Harlan).

Blackpoll Warbler: First reported from Hocking on 1 May (J. Fry), by 20 May 20+ could be found at HBSP (L. Rosche). Present through the cusp.

Cerulean Warbler: First noted 15 Apr at Shawnee SF, where there were 48 by 4 May (B. Royse). Two males were at ONWR 1 May, and one at MBSP 13 May (P. Rodewald). 11 May brought one to Magee (S&R Harlan), while a pair was building a nest in the CVNP the same day (D. Chasar).

Black-and-white Warbler: Arrived early, at least at Shawnee SF, with two on 6 Apr and nine by 14 Apr (B. Royse).

American Redstart: At Shawnee SF, seven were around on 15 Apr, and by 28 Apr 106 were tallied at Scioto Trail SF (both B. Royse). Migrants passed through the cusp.

Prothonotary Warbler: First at Tar Hollow SP 20 Apr (C. Barnett), by 6 May 14 males were at Hoover Res (C. Bombaci). At Magee, two were seen 29 May (D. Friedman).

Worm-eating Warbler: First found at Shawnee SF 15 Apr (B. Royse), with males heard at most stops in appropriate habitat 26 Apr (B. Sparks al.). Many records north of their customary haunts. Two at Magee 26 Apr (V. Fazio) and one there 28 May (D. Friedman), one at Mentor 29 Apr (L. Rosche), one in Parma 1 May (S. Zadar), one in Columbiana 7 May (B. O'Toole), one way out in Paulding 10 May (M&D Dunakin), and one at Specer Lk WA, Medina 17 May (J. Brumfield).
Ovenbird: Arrived 14 Apr at Shawnee SF, where 70 were present 19 Apr and 104 on 28 Apr (all B. Royse). Forty or more migrants were at Magee 10 May (J. Brumfield).

Northern Waterthrush: Appeared 26 Apr in Highland (D. Overacker) and at Navarre Marsh 30 Apr (BSBO). High count seven, at Magee 19 May (S&R Harlan).

Louisiana Waterthrush: First reported from the Cincinnati Nat Ctr 23 Mar (B. Lackner) with another in Ross 24 Mar (K. Sieg). High count 18 on 14 Apr at Shawnee SF (B. Royse).

Kentucky Warbler: Three noted first at Shawnee SF 19 Apr (J. Shraden), where 20 could be heard 3 May (B. Royse). One was a surprise in Paulding 1 May (M&D Dunakin), as was another that flew into BSBO’s nets at Navarre 6 May.

Connecticut Warbler: Several dozen reported, none nearly so early as a male banded at ONWR 10 May (P. Rodewald). The high count came from Magee, with three on the more expected date of 19 May (R&S Harlan).

Mourning Warbler: First reported 8 May at Magee (E. Saively), their numbers peaked there at seven on the 19th (S&R Harlan). A male at Walborn Res in Stark 7 May oddly continued singing through 31 May (B. Morrison).

Common Yellowthroat: Seen in Pike 17 Apr (Z. Allen) and in Coshocton 20 Apr (L.E. Yoder). The CVNP census of 10 May found a local record 222 (D. Chasar).

Hooded Warbler: Appeared 15 Apr at Shawnee, where 61 could be heard the 28th (B. Royse). One was at Sheldon Marsh 24 Apr (P. Dwight), another at Navarre 1 May (BSBO), and one at Metzger 16 May (J. Hammond). A local record 61 were tallied for the 10 May CVNP census in Cuyahoga and Summit.

Wilson’s Warbler: First reported as banded at Navarre by BSBO 4 May, then seen through the period, with a high count of 20 at Magee 25 May (S&R Harlan).

Canada Warbler: First migrants not reported until 10 May at Magee (J. Brumfield), when another bird was banded at Navarre (BSBO). Curiously, a fledgling was out of place in Washington TWP, Clinton and early on 24 May (ph and other details to OBRC).

Yellow-breasted Chat: First reported from Shawnee SF 23 Apr (B. Royse).

Summer Tanager: Arrived quite early 18 Apr in Clermont (B. Lackner). Three were at the Oak Openings 6 May (M. Anderson), one at Magee (J. Brumfield) and one at ONWR (L. Rosche) 15 May, and one banded at ONWR 20 May (P. Rodewald).

Scarlet Tanager: Also early, with the first reported 15 Apr at Shawnee SF (B. Royse).

Eastern Towhee: A healthy 84 were counted for CVNP’s census 10 May (D. Chasar).

American Tree Sparrow: The ONWR tallied 254 on 2 Mar. Late were a 12 Apr bird in BSBO’s nets at Navarre, one at N. Chagrin Resn the next day (K. Metcalf), and a true laggard at Dike 14 in Cleveland on 1 May (S. Zadar).

Chipping Sparrow: Migrants appeared in Clermont 20 Mar (M. Wessel), Athens 25 Mar (L. Andrews), Lucas 29 Mar (M. Anderson), and Lake 30 Mar (L. Rosche).

Clay-colored Sparrow: First discovered at a S. Euclid feeder 3 May (B. Finkelstein) then in Willoughby 6 May (N. Anderson). Five were seen on the big migration day of 10 May: two at HSP (G. Leidy), one at Magee (T. Bartlett), one at LSR (J. Pogacnik), and a singing male in Norton, Summit (R&S Harlan).

Vesper Sparrow: In Clermont by 25 Mar (B. Stanley), in Pickaway 29 Mar (B. Conlon), and in Lake 30 Mar (L. Rosche). Nine at N. Chagrin Resn 6 Apr (K. Metcalf).

Lark Sparrow: Arrived at the Oak Openings 29 Apr (Toledo MP staff), G. Links glimpsed a migrant just west of PCWA the following day.

Savannah Sparrow: One in Fairfield 2 Mar may have wintered locally (J. Watts). The high count was 24 on 1 May at Dike 14 in Cleveland (S. Zadar).

Grasshopper Sparrow: One was in Franklin by 20 Apr (R. Thorp), then Stark by 24 Apr (W. Sarno), and six at Crown City WA on 27 Apr (B. Royse). Returned to the Oak Openings 1 May (G. Links), and one was banded at ONWR 2 May (BSBO).

Henslow’s Sparrow: First reported from the VOA fields in Butler 23 Apr, where 10 were on station 28 May (M. Busam). J. Grabmeier counted 25 in Williams 26 May.

Fox Sparrow: First reported 6 Mar from Harrison (D. Smith), they peaked at ~70 at Magee 5 Apr (G. Links). Last reported 12 Apr at the CVNP (D. Chasar).

Song Sparrow: N. Cade saw 65 at EFSP 7 Mar, and J. Pogacnik 90+ at LSR 24 Mar.

Lincoln’s Sparrow: First 28 Apr at Magee (V. Fazio); 1 May brought 20 to Magee (R. Nirschl) and 16 to Dike 14 (S. Zadar). The latest report from Hocking 22 May (J. Fry).

Swamp Sparrow: Several sang in balmy weather 27 Mar at Killbuck (W. Sarno).

White-throated Sparrow: The ONWR of 4 May tallied 102, with several times that number at Magee on 10 May (n obs). Last reported at Navarre 28 May (BSBO).

White-crowned Sparrow: P. Rodewald reported a “very heavy flight on 1 May with literally hundreds in vegetation along the roads at ONWR” (where A. Boone/ide J. Kuenzi counted ~400 that day), and S. Zadar 200 at Dike 14 on 3 May. Last reported 23 May at Navarre (BSBO). K. Metcalf had a gambelli bird at N. Chagrin Resn 3 May, and Rodewald banded two, one 13 May at ONWR and one 20 May at CPNW.

Dark-eyed Junco: Larger numbers included 100+ in Scioto 5 Mar (B. Royse) and 150 at KPW 25 Mar (R. Dempier). Odd was a male 14 May on territory in suburban Orange, Cuyahoga in a “perfectly flat residential area with old conifer” (R&S Harlan).

Laplant Longspur: A flight of ~7400 over MBSP 16 Mar (V. Fazio) is Ohio’s second-largest count, next to H. Mayfield’s “crude estimate” of 10,000 in Toledo 1 May 1949. Also from the Toledo area were this spring’s final four, seen over Whitehouse during the huge migrational movement of 10 May (M. Anderson). Few near KPW this season.

Smith’s Longspur: On 8 Apr, an adult male was repeatedly observed by r obs near Sugarcreek in Tuscarawas in an agricultural field. Details are with the OBRC.

Snow Bunting: Last reported 8 Mar, in Paulding (D&M Dunakin).
Rose-breasted Grosbeak: A migrant was early at Camp Dennison in Hamilton 10 Apr (B. Foppe). Nesting in Hocking 4 May (J. Watts) and in Logan 6 May (T. Shively). By 10 May, 89 were in the CVNP for the local census (D. Chasar).

Blue Grosbeak: The first reported was a male in Clear Cr MP in Hocking 2 May (J. Fry), then one was found at Crown City WA 3 May (B. Rosse); the latter observer found a pair in Pickaway 8 May (nested with 3 young in June, T. Shively). A second-year male was banded at Navarre Marsh 11 May (BSBO). A female was at Caesar Cr SP 12 May (S. Reeves), and the first report from Adams came the following day (G. Miller). A male was at LSR 14 May (J. Pogancik), and a pair in Starr Twp in Hocking 29 May (L. Andrews).

Indigo Bunting: A wintering male persisted at N. Keller’s feeder through at least 19 Mar, and Keller also reported the first migrant, at MWW 27 Apr.

Dickcissel: Premonitory appearances: one in Paulding 30 May (D&M Dunakin), and 31 May in Butler (P. Wharton), with 15+ at Crown City WA in Gallia (J. Hammond).

Bobolink: The VOA had its first 23 Apr, then 30+ by 13 May, and 41 by 22 May (M. Busam). The first noted at OWR came on 30 Apr (P. Rodewald).

Eastern Meadowlark: Fifty were at Butler’s VOA grasslands 12 Mar (J. Brown), and the observed number among breeders leveled out at 34 there 22 May (M. Busam).

Western Meadowlark: At ONWR, what was probably a single male was noted 29 Apr and 5, 6, and 10 May (P. Rodewald, m obs). Two were discovered 30 Apr, one on Buena Vista Rd in Hocking (B. Morrison et al.) and one near Whitehouse, Lucas (E. Tramer).

Rusty Blackbird: High count 50, in Geauga 30 Mar (K. Metcalf). Quite late was a male banded at CPNWR 20 May (P. Rodewald).

Brewer’s Blackbird: Groups of five and 12 were in Jerusalem Twp, Lucas 22 Mar (G. Links). B. Morrison had two in Hartville, Stark with a flock of grackles and rusty 31 Mar. Unexpected was one that provided prolonged looks at LSR 24 May (J. Pogancik).

Orchard Oriole: Arrived 23 Apr at Shawnee (B. Rosse). The high count was 10+ at Kelleys Isl 16 May (K. Keteal).

Balitmore Oriole: Earliest in Tuscarawas 15 Apr (E. Schlabach), with a high count of 164 at LSR 10 May (J. Pogancik).

Purple Finch: Sparse. J. Fry had one in Hocking 9 Mar, and one was in Adams 27 Mar (P. Whan). High count four on the CVNP census 10 May (D. Chasar). One was in Akron 15 May (R&S Harlan), a male at Hartville in Stark 26 May (B. Morrison), and males on territory at two Mosquito LK WA sites 30 May (D. Hochadel).

Pine Siskin: Very scarce, with two at LSR 11 May (J. Pogancik) and one at pine-free PCWA 19 May (S&R Harlan).

Contributors

It’s official—for aficionados of nesting birds, the summer season is too damned short. Here in northern Ohio, nesting studies are productive from the last week of May through the first week or two of July. Although seemingly never as popular as migrational birthing, breeding season birthing has, over the years, seemed to run hot and cold. Oologists, mostly in the form of men and boys scouring the countryside hunting for eggs and nests for their personal collections, ruled the roost from the mid-1880s through the mid-1930s, when their hobby fell out of favor. Also in the mid-1930s, but perhaps on a nobler basis, Lawrence E. Hicks distilled the combined knowledge of “the five score ornithologists of the state” in his 1935 Distribution of the Breeding Birds of Ohio (Ohio Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 32, 6(3):125-190). Many birders would conduct local nesting studies in the interim, but the next intensive statewide effort wasn’t attempted until Ohio’s breeding bird atlas project began collecting data in 1982, continuing through 1987. In all, some 500 volunteers provided 30,000 hours of data collection for this cause. It doesn’t seem conceivable that 21 years have passed since data collection began, but such is the case. After six years of atlassing efforts, nesting season studies understandably tapered off somewhat through the 1990s. But I sense a renaissance of sorts today, with more and more birders picking up the nesting season torch. This is very good news for me, a dedicated summer birder. I usually don’t need much of an excuse to go birding in the summer months, but this year, I came up with two.

It is a matter of fact that some areas are birded much more intensively than others. No news flash here. But as a compiler of birching records, anecdotes, and other miscellaneous detritus, this has been especially apparent to me. Back in the early 1990s, I was working on a project that studied published Ohio rare bird records. During the early portions of the project, I kept track of which of Ohio’s 88 counties were represented by these records, and I was, for some reason, particularly interested in which county seemed to produce the fewest records of rare birds. I found out. To this day, virtually no bird reports of any kind emerge from this particular county. Not even one Christmas Bird Count circle overlaps its borders. It is clearly a very seldom-birded area. With that kind of history, I knew I needed to go there and sample it for myself.

But it wouldn’t be any fun to just announce the county in question. Rather, I thought it might be more interesting to offer this short list of facts regarding our mystery county, and let you ponder the possibilities:

- It is located in southeast central Ohio.
- Its population, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, stands at 15,180 (down from 28,351 in 1850, 27,031 in 1900, and 15,362 in 1950).
- It ranks as the fourth least-populated county in Ohio.

Is it Monroe County? Why, yes it is. Situated along the Ohio River in one of Ohio’s several “Little Switzerland,” it is actually very pretty, and very dominated by a landscape of heavily wooded hillsides cut by numerous small streams. Unlike in many areas, where birders need to seek out a good patch of habitat, my wife Sandy and I found good habitat virtually everywhere we looked as we crisscrossed the county this past June 1. If one can view monotony as a good thing, it was that; out of 86 likely nesting species we found, fully 51 seemed numerous enough to be thought of as Common, due in large part to the abundance of certain habitats. For comparison, The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas (Peterjohn and Rice 1991) reported from 92 to 94 Confirmed or Probable nesting species in the county, while Hicks in 1935 tallied 95 nesting species. Not much changes in Monroe County, it seems.

Hayfields predominated on the cleared ridge tops, but for some reason these did not seem to attract many grassland birds, and we did poorly with this group. Strip-mines have barely made an impact in Monroe County, further diminishing opportunities for grassland specialists. Meadowlarks were aplenty, however, and we were quite surprised by several vesper sparrows in an Ohio habitat unusual in our experience—a gravel lane cutting through an ungrazed pasture with woody margins. Perhaps this habitat is more reminiscent of those favored by Vesper sparrows when the species was much more numerous and widespread in the state, back in Hicks’s day.

Obviously, woodland species were the most prevalent, although edge species were also quite numerous. I doubt I have ever found more orchard orioles in a single day in Ohio, as we tallied no fewer than 30. One particular tract of wooded habitat was especially appealing—119-acre Piatt Park, administered by the Monroe County Park District. Piatt Park features deep hemlock ravine with a stream, caves, trails, and even a boardwalk. Although this park is very reminiscent of portions of Hocking County, we were surprised that the only so-called “northern nesters” we could turn up were northern parulas; based on the quality of the habitat, I would have guessed that at least blue-headed vireos and black-throated green warblers would also have been present. The Breeding Bird Atlas also failed to find...
these species there. This lack of “northern nesters” makes little sense to me, with the habitat apparently so well suited to them; I suspect they must make a home here, at least in some years. Perhaps someone should propose this site for a blue-headed vireo introduction project. Then again, perhaps not.

Several spots along the Ohio River also looked very productive. Two large embayments (clearly depicted in your DeLorme Atlas and Gazetteer) must get their share of good birds in migration when water levels fluctuate. On June 1, with water levels high, we found all of Ohio’s nesting swallow species, plus an unexpected adult bald eagle.

Did I mention Bewick’s wren, Swainson’s warbler, or Bachman’s sparrow? Well, we had none of those, although in a county as underbirded as Monroe, who knows what surprises may remain? Monroe County may be a bit out of the way, but it’s surely worth a look. Once you get there, just remember to report what you find!

My second goal this summer was to develop a roadside nesting season survey, patterned (extremely) loosely on the USGS’s North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS). Very briefly, a BBS route consists of 50 precise three-minute stops along a predetermined 24.5-mile roadside route, in which all likely breeding species are tallied, individually by individual. As of 2002, Ohio hosted 68 such routes, a small fraction of the 4449 routes scattered across the U.S. and Canada. Combined, these routes provide some of the best data available for describing long-term avian population trends on a continent-wide scale. For serious birders, the BBS is a great way to channel your energies for a good cause. Actually, in 2002 only 46 of 68 Ohio routes were taken, so many more volunteers are needed. For further details on Ohio routes, contact state coordinator Scott Hull at (740) 747-2525, extension 23, or at <Scott.Hull@dnr.state.oh.us>.

It has been my privilege to run the Pittsfield BBS route (located in Lorain, Huron, and Ashland counties) for over 10 years now. While always acknowledging the importance of consistency in maintaining exact stops from year to year, and strict study guidelines, I have nonetheless found official BBS routes somewhat restrictive, and a bit too time-consuming, given that a route typically takes from four to five hours to complete.

So, after a bit of experimentation, I came up with a form of “BBS Lite,” designed to taste great and be less filling—less restrictive and easier to run before work or school. In truth, this survey is intended to be more a challenge than any real gauge of population levels. Basically, it is a 10-mile roadside route with a two-hour time limit, in which one counts only the number of species, rather than the numbers of individual birds. At the very least, this would give us some idea of which areas of the state have the richest roadside species diversity. Which 10 miles of Ohio roadside can claim the most species?

Despite much grumbling from the underworked and grievously overpaid Ohio Cardinal marketing gurus, who are always looking for ways to cash in on a catchy acronym, I have chosen to name this survey the “Further Afield Two-Hour Extreme Avian Derby”, or FATHEAD for short. Its six rules are as elegant as its name. 1) Each roadside route is plotted entirely by your choice, anywhere in the state. 2)
saga was as interesting as always on the Overton route, which crosses the boundary for both of our nesting species. Several black-cappeds were found north of town, but only Carolinas could be found south of town. An osprey nest was obvious at Lake Rockwell, and herring gulls were also potential nesters there. The rural Chippewa Lake route provided a least bittern, cliff swallow, and prothonotary warbler, all real surprises for Medina County. The 82 species found on the Mohican route may prove to be tough to top; although I feel that this particular route could come up with more than 82 species on the right day, other potential Ohio routes might have a difficult time besting that mark. Certainly a carefully planned Hocking Hills route has a chance, and perhaps so does a meticulous Oak Openings route; regardless, I don’t think a better mark will come easily. Prove me wrong. Goodies at Mohican included red-breasted nuthatch (three sites), hermit thrush, magnolia and Canada warblers, and dark-eyed junco (two sites). The Riverview Road route provided plenty of traffic, plus a yellow-throated warbler in someone’s front yard. At the more peaceful Oak Hill area of the CVNP, interesting finds were two alder flycatchers, two more red-breasted nuthatches, brown creeper, and my first summer Summit County record of pine warbler, again in someone’s front yard. They have good front yards there.

But what about other areas—can a good marshland route be devised? Perhaps something combining Big Island WA with Killdeer Plains. How would Adams County fare? A route through the eastern half of the CVNP should theoretically outproduce the two routes I ran there this season, now that I think about it. The key is to remember that the tough species must be readily findable from the road. Combine that with a variety of habitats, and you’ve got yourself a contending route. Please excuse me for a moment, I must check to see if a reasonable 10-mile Hocking Hills route can be made to stretch from Clear Creek Road to the northern tip of Lake Logan. Now where’s that DeLorme...

Molt Strategies in Adult Dowitchers:
Criteria for Field Identification in Fall Migration in Ohio

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In the shorebird world, there are many clear and simple identifications that leave a birder feeling confident and well informed. There are also species groups frustrating enough to make one feel a distinct contempt for all avian life, and tempted to throw scope and binoculars into the mud in order to pursue a more unambiguous hobby—say, the field identification of teneral Leistes damselflies. The dowitchers form one such group.

Historically, the taxonomy of the genus Limnodromus has been tricky, going through a series of lump and splits until 1950, when two distinct species were recognized: the short-billed dowitcher L. griseus, and the long-billed dowitcher L. scolopaceus (Pitelka 1950). Further complicating matters are three recognized subspecies of short-billed dowitchers. Nominate L. g. griseus migrates through the Atlantic coastal region, L. g. hendersoni is a more Midwestern breeder and migrant, and L. g. caurinus dwells in the Pacific coastal region. Fortunately for Ohio birders, only hendersoni regularly occurs in the Buckeye State. Unfortunately for Ohio birders, this is the subspecies of short-billed dowitcher most closely resembling the long-billed dowitcher in appearance. Thus, identification of Ohio dowitchers by plumage alone is seldom a matter of dull routine, in the field or even in the hand.

The various plumages of dowitchers have been treated in depth in several papers and field guides, such that despite the difficulties birders now have the resources available to separate most birds reliably. As fine as these articles are, however, important points of identification can remain confusing, even with the bird in hand. One author’s “broken barring” can be another author’s “wide spotting.” “Dull rufous” can look all too similar to “dark salmon.” The only good way to learn to identify dowitchers is to study them carefully in the field, take good notes, and establish one’s own concepts compatible with the literature. One may even discover a reliable field mark no one has ever noticed or adequately treated heretofore. One emerging field mark in dowitcher identification is state of molt during the autumn migration.

It has been asserted in several recent publications that long-billed dowitchers undergo a complete molt during migration, while short-billed dowitchers, like most other shorebirds, do not molt until they reach the wintering grounds. Birders will find this information useful, but may wonder why this distinction is untreated, or even seemingly contradicted, in many respected sources on the genus Limnodromus. This paper will examine molt in Ohio dowitchers more closely, and attempt to clear up some of the potential confusion in the literature. Although the

These Caspian terns graced the beach at Caesar Creek State Park in Warren County on 21 April 2003. Photo by Jay Lehman.
information presented here may be applicable elsewhere, much of it may be unique to Ohio and neighboring states. Readers in other regions wishing to tackle this subject should use this article as a stepping-stone for their own observations and research.

Shorebird Molt: A General Overview

Because the long-billed dowitcher’s molt strategy is so unusual, even by contrast with its congener, it may be worth reviewing the fundamentals central to studying molt in any species. The importance of a knowledge of molt cycles and age classes cannot be overemphasized when attempting to identify the harder groups of shorebirds. At times during molt, birds in juvenile, adult, and varying degrees of transitional plumage may be present side by side, making a single-species flock look surprisingly diverse. Couple this with normal variations among individuals of a given age and species, and things on the mudflat can get pretty confusing. A working knowledge of molt and aging first allows for proper identification as to age, which tremendously narrows down the possibilities for species identification. When identifying western and semipalmated sandpipers in fall, for example, the difference between adults and juveniles of the same species can be greater than the difference between different species of the same age.

Molt cycles are useful to know for the sake of identification, but are made still more fascinating by the role they play in a species’ natural history, biology, and conservation. Molt is a metabolically demanding process, with increased energy requirements of 10-25%, depending on the climate (Cech et al. 2001). Thus, birds need more abundant food sources to undertake molt, which for most shorebirds means shallows and mudflats teeming with tasty invertebrates. Molt also can impair flight efficiency, as missing wing feathers compel a bird to beat its wings faster. Therefore most birds do not molt heavily during migration, as the energy requirements for sustaining migration and growing new feathers simultaneously would be far too great. There are, however, exceptions to this generalization. Recognizing that a few shorebird species do molt on migration, or use known stopover areas to complete molt during migration, is crucial to conservation applications such as proper wetlands management. In a quickly developing and evermore crowded world, the preservation of biodiversity hinges on such delicate intricacies.

Nearly all our shorebirds are medium- to long-distance migrants, breeding as far north as the high Arctic and wintering as far away as the limits of ice-free land in the southern hemisphere. They have evolved a rigorous schedule of breeding, migrating, and molting, each species’ agenda varying with the particulars of its ranges, prey selection, and reproductive requirements. A typical schedule of plumage progression among shorebirds looks like this:

- **Late spring to summer:** Chick hatches, emerges from the egg with a covering of natal down. This briefly-held plumage is worn only close to the nest.
- **Summer:** The first full set of feathers, the juvenile plumage, comes in. Because of the stress of growing them all at once, juvenile feathers are smaller and weaker than adult feathers (Hayman et al. 1993). Scapulars smaller and more rounded than those of older birds will reveal neat rows of wing coverts that on adult birds would often be obscured by longer, looser scapulars. In many species juvenile upperparts feathers are edged in bright buff, white, or rufous, creating a distinct scaly appearance. Juvenile plumage in nearly all species is worn during migration and not replaced until birds reach the wintering grounds. The exceptions in our region are purple sandpiper and dunlin, which undergo prebasic molt close to the breeding grounds (Pittaway 1999). Among migrants, the fresh, uniform, and bright appearance of juveniles sets them apart from adults.
- **Fall:** Upon arrival on the wintering grounds, juveniles of most species undergo prebasic molt, usually partial and involving only head and body feathers and a varying amount of scapulars and coverts. First-winter birds can often be identified as such by retained flight feathers, tertials, or coverts.
- **Spring:** First-winter birds molt into first-summer plumage. For many species this is the most poorly understood and variable plumage, ranging in overall appearance from essentially basic to nearly full alternate. This molt is usually partial, so by late summer flight feathers are a whole year old, and thus extremely worn, faded, and tattered. Often, birds stay on or near the wintering grounds during their first summer, while others may migrate like adults to the north.

- **Fall:** All birds, immature and adult, undergo a complete molt into definitive (adult) basic plumage. This molt, as stated earlier, is usually completed on the wintering grounds, although adults of many species, such as semipalmated, western, white-rumped, and still sandpipers display conspicuous contour feather molt during migration, with fresh gray scapulars and coverts showing up strongly against worn and faded alternate feathers. Aside from long-billed dowitchers, discussed in more detail later, only avocets, stilts, and Wilson’s and red-necked phalaropes molt flight feathers on migration (Paulson, pers. comm.). Greater yellowlegs may initiate flight feather molt before migration and suspend it until after migration is completed (Cech et al. 2001), and as stated, dunlin and purple sandpiper complete prebasic molt before migration (Pittaway 1999). Otherwise, flight feather molt in shorebirds occurs on or near the wintering grounds.
- **Spring:** Birds acquire alternate (breeding) plumage through a partial molt, completed by the time a bird reaches the breeding grounds. Although there are fewer plumage types to grapple with in spring, there is no lack of variation. On a trip to Homer, Alaska this May, the author noticed that the vast majority of dunlins present were in full alternate plumage, while a larger percentage of western sandpipers still had basic feathers remaining and alternate feathers not fully grown in.

As stated, the above molt schedule is typical, and there are certainly other exceptions besides the ones noted above. Also, individual variation should never be neglected. With the basic principles of shorebird molt in mind, we can return to the study of dowitchers and their unique molt strategies.
Evidence for Long-billed Dowitcher Staging and Molting in Ohio

In both species of dowitchers, as in many other shorebirds, southbound adults migrate well before the juveniles. Short-billed dowitcher adults arrive in Ohio in late June through early July, with numbers peaking in mid- to late July and tapering off by mid-August, when the first juvenile short-bills arrive (Peterjohn 2001). Juveniles peak in mid- to late September, and nearly all are gone by early October. Short-billed dowitchers are most numerous in the marshes of northwestern Ohio, with numbers occasionally exceeding 1000, and are common but less abundant elsewhere in Ohio (Peterjohn 2001).

The long-billed dowitcher is a later autumn migrant and although often numerous in Lucas and Ottawa counties of northwestern Ohio, it can be difficult to find elsewhere in the state. Adults appear by late July, peak by the end of August, and may stay in numbers through September and October. Juvenile long-billed dowitchers do not reach the state until September, peak during October, and remain through November (Peterjohn 2001).

The fall migration of long-billed dowitchers brings us to the more interesting characteristics of the species and to the heart of this article. Long-billed dowitchers are unique among North American shorebirds in that adults are known to migrate to staging areas during fall migration, then to undergo a complete molt before continuing their migration. As stated above, while some other shorebirds may undergo a limited amount of body molt during fall migration, they do not initiate flight-feather molt until they reach the wintering grounds.

The only published references to the staging and molting of Ohio long-billed dowitchers are Dunn (1999) and Peterjohn (2001), where the marshes of northwestern Ohio, especially Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area and adjacent Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, are described as probably the only Midwestern locale where long-billed dowitchers are known to stage to molt, and the only known staging area in the interior of North America east of the Mississippi River (Peterjohn, pers. comm.). Although Dunn did not publish until 1999, he and others were aware of the phenomenon during the 1980s and early 1990s (Peterjohn, pers. comm., R. Harlan, pers. comm.). Examination of seasonal ornithological publications treating Ohio reveals many records of long-billed dowitchers numbering in the hundreds in marshes throughout northwestern Ohio in the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, including 400 adults at Metzger in August 1991 (Harlan 1991), 250 on 29 August 1992 at Metzger (Harlan 1992), 300 in September 1988 along “western Lake Erie” (Peterjohn 1989), and 370 on 12 October 1983 (Peterjohn 1984). These September and October flocks may contain many basic or transitional adults, but 365 birds present at Ottawa on 4 November 1990 (McKinney & Thomas 1990) and 125 birds at Metzger on 10 November 1990 (Kemp 1990) were assuredly mostly juveniles.

The staging of birds at Metzger Marsh continued until 1996, after which a newly constructed dike eliminated suitable shorebird habitat (Dunn 1999, Harlan, pers. comm., Peterjohn, pers. comm.). Whether the hundreds of birds that used the habitat at Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area have relocated to other areas in northwestern Ohio is unknown, but large numbers still occur at adjacent Ottawa National...
Discussion of Dowitchers in Ohio

It is well established that long-billed dowitchers have staged and molted in Ohio and hopefully continue to do so, but that does not mean that the issue is free of confusion or completely resolved. For example, do long-billed dowitchers stop in one particular location to initiate, undergo, and complete their molt, or do they initiate molt in one location and complete it throughout the rest of their migration? Dunn (1999 and pers. comm.) suggests that birds require a long-term stopover area to initiate and complete molt, based on observations that birds occurring in less established habitats for shorter periods of time are in largely alternate plumage and certain have not yet begun flight-feather molt. Supporting this theory is the fact that most long-bills passing through Ontario, where there is apparently little suitable staging habitat, are not in wing or heavy body molt and most likely fly to other staging areas, such as in Ohio or the Atlantic coast, to undergo molt before traveling to the wintering grounds (Pittaway, pers. comm.). Some long-bills in passage through Ontario are, however, in heavy body and wing molt (Pittaway 1999); these are presumably the birds that find enough food and habitat to stay for extended periods (Pittaway, pers. comm.). However, one cannot be absolutely certain until a large-scale study is done with a large group of staging long-billed dowitchers to determine how much turnover there is in a flock over a given period of time. If there is a large amount of turnover, then long-bills may indeed be able to migrate actively while molting (an even more unusual phenomenon) but if the membership of the flock is constant, then presumably the birds require a long-term stopover site to complete the molt before moving on. If this is the case—and so far it appears to be—then the long-bills that formerly stayed at Metzger would be forced either to find a nearby staging area (such as Ottawa NW or Pte. Moultrie) or overfly the state entirely. The extent to which the conversion of Metzger Marsh to a flooded diked impoundment has affected the overall populations of long-billed dowitchers is unknown, but in any case the staging of long-billed dowitchers is an unusual feature of Ohio’s biodiversity that should be protected for its unique status in the Midwest as a resource for these birds.

Observers in other parts of Ohio, away from the traditional staging grounds, may be able to contribute valuable information about this phenomenon as well. If observers note and report the state of molt of every dowitcher they see, then we should have a clearer picture of exactly what is happening. If all long-billed dowitchers seen in short-term situations away from northwest Ohio are in full alternate or basic plumage, than it can be assumed that the birds require a long-term, dependable stopover site to molt. It would seem counterproductive for a bird that can’t migrate with missing flight feathers to begin molting primaries or large patches of body feathers on a mudflat that could quickly dry up or flood (Dunn 1999). If, however, long-bills are seen away from northwestern Ohio with missing flight feathers, then perhaps they are able to molt these during active migration. This is unlikely, but possible. Body molt should be noted as well, as birds in extensive body molt are usually molting flight feathers simultaneously (Pittaway, pers. comm.), although flight-feather molt has been noted before body molt has commenced (Takekawa and Warnock 2000). Flight-feather molt is easily seen when birds take flight and gaps in the wings are visible (Dunn, pers. comm.). Finally, it would be helpful if birders in nearby Midwestern states could be aware of all of the above considerations.

Dowitchers Outside Ohio

In the United States outside of Ohio, long-billed dowitcher staging has been noted, among other places, in Idaho (Paulson 1993), Montana (Dunn 1999), Nevada, Utah, Kansas, and North Dakota (Takekawa and Warnock 2000), southern California (Dunn, pers. comm.), and Delaware (Dunn 1999) and elsewhere on the east coast (M. O’Brien, pers. comm.). Paulson also noted many long-billed dowitchers in extensive wing molt from Washington and Oregon, including wing molt in a large number of specimens (pers. comm.). However, wing molt in the Pacific Northwest, California, the east coast, or the southern states may not necessarily carry the same implications as it would in the Midwest, as dowitchers are known to winter in all of those regions. Wing and body molt, for example, can be seen in both species in the mid-Atlantic states in late August (O’Brien, pers. comm.). To complicate things further, first-summer birds are more prevalent in areas on or near the wintering grounds, and these birds often begin flight-feather molt earlier (O’Brien, pers. comm.).

Ignoring areas on or near the wintering range of either species makes things far less complicated, but there are still intricacies in the timing and location of dowitcher migrations throughout the interior of the United States that are unknown to this author, and consequently this paper will not attempt to generalize. However, forthcoming papers by University of Montana graduate student Caleb Putnam should help by applying concrete evidence to questions still ridden with speculation. Putnam examined hundreds of fall adult dowitcher specimens from the interior of the North America, finding long-billed dowitchers commonly in wing molt, while finding no evidence of wing molt in short-billed dowitchers (Putnam, pers. comm.). It would be tremendously helpful if such an exhaustive specimen review could be followed by an equally thorough banding study of migrating birds.

Sorting Out the Literature

So, the reader may be saying, long-billed dowitchers are known to molt on migration and short-bills don’t, then what’s all the fuss? Let us consider the following quotations from a series of well-known sources. Each is presented respectfully, and the intention is not to point out any error made by the author or authors, but to accurately portray the ongoing debate as well as show how confusion can arise simply from the structure of a sentence. Each quotation is followed by commentary in an attempt to sort out the information.

1) “…scopaceus [long-billed dowitcher] often retains its breeding plumage longer than either griseus or hendersoni. Many, if not most, long-bills reaching the Atlantic coast in mid-August are still in this plumage; they are easily separated from short-bills, which by this time are decidedly gray. Replacement of the head
feathers apparently takes place early in *scolopaceus* postnuptial molt. The result is that adult long-bills in late August take on a very gray-faced, red-bellied appearance, which is distinctive" (Jehl 1963).

This statement is especially important because information in several subsequent papers is based largely upon Jehl's extensive studies of dowitchers in New Jersey. Kept in the appropriate context, his statement is not necessarily definitive, as it applies only to dowitchers on the East coast. The short-billed dowitcher is known to winter on the East coast, and it arrives there much earlier than long-billed does, so it would make sense that it would start its molt earlier. The staging and molting in northeastern Ohio is not a recent phenomenon; the specimens at Ohio State University (see above) were collected between 1936 and 1972, with several collected in the late 1950s, around the time Jehl was conducting his studies. Therefore, the fully alternate long-billed dowitchers Jehl observed must have overflown Ohio and other locales directly to New Jersey. Perhaps the birds that stage and molt in Ohio follow a different migration route to more southerly wintering grounds, rather than flying to the mid-Atlantic states in basic plumage. Only a large-scale banding or radio-telemetry study could determine this.

2) "By mid-August many Long-billed Dowitchers are in molt, being a mixture of red, gray and black...Moult in Longbills is later than in Shortbills...Yet the head and neck can be moulded rather early...Tertials and a few scapulars appear to be the last breeding feathers retained by Longbills.

"Late in summer, beginning in mid-July, [adult short-billed dowitchers] can begin to moult. Body feathers are lost in a different sequence than on Longbills; scapulars and underpart feathers are molten in an uneven pattern. Therefore, many individuals begin to lose their solidly colored underparts early-on" (Jaramillo et al. 1991).

This statement was based largely on Jehl (1963). Away from the wintering grounds, in the interior of North America (the above article was intended to describe the situation in southern Ontario), short-bills do not molt earlier than long-bills, and probably do not undergo such extensive body molt. Pittaway later retracted the above statement, saying, "During the mid-1990s I began to realize that southbound hendersoni were not molting in Ontario" (pers. comm.).

3) "In Long-billed Dowitcher, the post-breeding moult begins in early July. Moult in Long-billed tends to begin with the neck and head, a few scapulars and the rear flanks. They retain the reddish underparts for some time after the moult has started, but the dowitcher displaying a white rear flank patch could well be a Long-billed in the first states of moult. In hendersoni, and probably also griseus, the underparts and scapulars are often the first feathers to be moulted, so birds appear patchy below from late July onwards" (Henshaw and Jaramillo 1995).

There is not necessarily anything contradictory about this statement, but observers should be aware that gray areas on the underparts of short-billed dowitchers may be the result of retained basic feathers from the previous year's molt, rather than newly-molted feathers (see above).

4) "The molt from alternate to basic begins in late July and is complete by early September for Short-bills; Long-bill molt begins in early to mid-August and is usually complete by mid-September" (Wilds & Newlon 1983).

This statement is not incorrect if applied only to regions near the wintering grounds of short-billed dowitcher (i.e., the Atlantic coast). In Ohio, numbers of adult short-bills have passed their peak by late July and most are gone by mid-August, so the statement is irrelevant anyway. In this case, it is crucial to consider migration timing by including dates. Without dates, the quote could be misinterpreted as a blanket statement that short-bills molt before long-bills; in that case, it would imply for Midwestern birders that short-bills molt on migration. Had the authors mentioned location as well, it would have avoided potential confusion.

5) "Males [short-billed dowitchers] start molting head, face, and neck about 16 Jul on breeding grounds (females already departed). Adults in heavy body molt when they pass through Magdalen Is., Quebec, in mid-Jul and Aug...and in same time period along mid-Atlantic coast...Molting body-feathering increases in intensity and molt of remiges begins as soon as birds leave breeding grounds. Along Atlantic coast, adult females may replace all but outer 3 primaries by 5–10 Aug, males all but the outermost primaries by 18 Aug. Primary molt typically completed 5–15 Sep. Some adults finish body molt by mid-Aug in New Jersey, but mid-Sep usual" (Jehl et al. 2001).

This quotation is from the *Birds of North America* account for short-billed dowitcher. The statement "molt of remiges begins as soon as birds leave breeding grounds" certainly does not apply to the hendersoni subspecies. To the extent it is accurate, perhaps it applies uniquely to the Atlantic griseus subspecies, based on the close proximity of its breeding grounds to its wintering grounds. As for adult females replacing primaries on the mid-Atlantic coast by the first half of August, these are most likely birds that winter in the region, but again, a banding study would prove valuable in establishing this.

6) "Adult [short-billed dowitchers] begin body molt soon after arrival [in the Pacific Northwest]; underparts showing more and more white and then upperparts more and more gray. In northern part of region body molt essentially complete in some individuals by mid August" (Paulson 1993).

This statement applies only to caurinus, perhaps birds that winter in or near the Pacific Northwest region.

7) "Adult Long-billed may molt more rapidly than Short-billed in fall and typically look gray-headed (more so than Short-billed) while passing through [Pacific] Northwest. Molt into nonbreeding plumage begins in late August, and by late September many adult Long-billed are in virtually complete nonbreeding plumage" (Paulson 1993).

Paulson has rethought the statement (pers. comm.) that "adult Long-billed may molt more rapidly than Short-billed in fall," stating that migration timing may give the appearance of a different molt strategy. In other words, long-bills stick around in the Pacific Northwest to molt, whereas short-bills pass through too quickly for
observers to notice any molting. The same is true in Ohio: long-billed stay to molt during their migration, while short-billed do not molt until they reach the wintering grounds. How rapidly a molt is completed or even how early (see quotation number four above) is in fact irrelevant locally.

Clearly, the literature on dowitchers can be very confusing. It is important to pay close attention to the specific dates mentioned, and if possible, try to determine exactly to which region the author is referring. An author from the Atlantic coast, for example, may seem to generalize about all short-billed dowitchers, but may be influenced entirely by observations of local populations.

Elsewhere in the literature, little has been published on this subject. A recent study of dowitchers staging in Saskatchewan (Alexander & Gratto-Trevor 1997) mentioned primary molt in both species, but many, including one of the authors, have apparently questioned the ultimate validity of the species identifications during the study (B. Whan, pers. comm.). A DNA analysis of blood samples taken during the study is needed.

Conclusions, Final Questions, and Cautions

There is ample evidence to support the conclusion that any fall adult dowitcher undergoing heavy body molt and any wing molt in Ohio, and likely the rest of interior North America north of the wintering grounds, is certainly a long-billed dowitcher. However, it is also clear that not all long-billed dowitchers passing through Ohio are in molt, so a dowitcher in fully alternate plumage could be either species. The appearance of body molt should be approached with caution for reasons discussed above. There is little evidence for hendersoni short-bills undergoing more than a sparse amount of body molt, but several references have noted that griseus and caurinus may be in heavier body molt on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, respectively (see “Sorting Out the Literature”). Whether there is any subspecific difference in short-billed dowitcher molt strategy, or whether all differences are based on migration timing, needs further study. Birders on either coast cannot necessarily use molt alone as an identification criterion, as they may be too close to the wintering grounds, where either species may be molting. Timing of the molt, however, may prove useful (O’Brien, pers. comm.) in such cases.

The discussion above pertains to adult birds only. Dozens of Ohio specimens of juvenile long-billed dowitchers at the Ohio State University were in heavy body molt. Therefore, it is necessary first to identify a bird as to age. Juvenal-plumaged dowitchers are decidedly easier to identify, so any study of molt is incidental for them. Although quite unlikely in Ohio, first-summer birds molting into basic plumage could present further confusion.

Birders in Ohio and nearby states should more aware of the state of molt of dowitchers in passage, and take notes for publication in local journals. Birders should also pay close attention to habitats that may be used as staging grounds. Ohio has already lost one prime location; more losses in the future could be detrimental to the species.

Finally, even once we learn the particulars of molt in long-billed dowitchers and in all subspecies of short-billed dowitcher, we still have not answered the most interesting question of all: “Why?” Why do long-bills stage to molt on migration? What is it about the biology of the species that selects for this unique behavior? Does it have to do with prey selection, migration distance, or other factors? What percentage of the population stops during migration to molt, and what percentage flies directly to the wintering grounds? Are these different populations isolated on the breeding grounds? Have we overlooked other species that employ the same strategy? It may take an extensive study to answer these questions. But then again, it may not. Birders have keen eyes, observational skills that can’t be learned in any classroom, good optics, natural curiosity, and most importantly, spend a great deal of time in the field. Dowitcher identification may seem like a task to some birders, but if one’s observations are really worth something, it can become suddenly very interesting and consequential.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to Bill Whan, who was instrumental in my research and composition, providing resources, contacts, and encouragement. I am very grateful to Jon Dunn, Ron Pittaway, Dennis Paulson, Michael O’Brien, Bruce Peterjohn, Rob Harlan, Mike Bolton, Larry Rosche, John Idzikowski, and Matte Kenne for sharing with me their knowledge of dowitcher identification and distribution. Thanks to Caleb Putnam for taking the time to assist and guide me with this project, especially with necessary tips for examining dowitcher skins. Thanks to Dr. David Winkler at Cornell University, John Condit at The Ohio State University Museum of Biological Diversity, and Dr. Tim Matson at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History for access to the dowitcher specimens at their institutions. Finally, warm and deeply appreciative thanks to Paula Lozano and Bob Finkelstein, who showed me my first dowitcher on 16 May 1999 at Mallard Club Marsh Wildlife Area.

References


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**Short Note: Wintering Merlins in Cuyahoga County**

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In preparation for the 2002-2003 Ohio Winter Bird Survey, I would occasionally stop at Calvary Cemetery and nearby sandpit ponds, east of Cleveland's Miles Avenue and along the border with Garfield Heights in Cuyahoga County, checking for new arrivals. As I scouted the area in December, the birds seemed not as numerous as in the past. The cemetery was not very exciting, but that was soon to change.

On 11 December 2002, while driving the perimeter as usual, I observed a falcon. Thinking it was the American kestrel I had observed on other occasions, I turned the car around for a better view. Then ahead I noticed what seemed to be another falcon. I got out to make sure I was seeing two birds, not the same one that might have moved. There they were: two merlins *Falco columbarius*, a brown female/immature and a gray male! I was not to observe two merlins at once here again until 6 January 2003, the beginning of an almost daily winter merlin survey.

On 30 December at 5:04 pm, I observed the gray bird fly from what I had identified as the pre-roost tree (PRT) to the roost tree for the night. This was a very exciting evening, but was it to be a one-time event? The answer was no. Every night the gray bird resorted to this same tree, except for evenings when the local Cooper's hawks were around hunting.

On 6 January 2003, I observed the gray merlin chasing another, a brown one. The next day I observed the gray bird in his PRT (a pine) and the brown bird in a deciduous tree in Section 85 that later became her PRT.

The gray bird, the "restroom merlin," as he came to be called because his roost tree stood beside the cemetery's brick restrooms building, was observed each night except 10 February, when Cleveland experienced a sudden, severe snowstorm that came in from Lake Erie, producing whiteout conditions with 45-mph winds. I suspect that gray bird got caught out hunting and chose an emergency roost. I did leave early that night, so he may have come in later.

The next day I drove around the cemetery and saw no merlins. I headed back to the restroom area and there on top of the utility pole just outside the cemetery was the gray bird, eating a house sparrow! I had observed the merlins eating on only two occasions. This was also the day I observed a third merlin, also a brown female/immature. Not a routine visitor, this third bird showed up at the cemetery perhaps only three times a week.

On 23 February, after a weekend away birding, I made the usual drive around, looking for the merlins. To my astonishment, the gray bird's PRT had been cut down! I couldn't believe it! I continued driving around and finally found the gray bird in a tree above the roadway south of the former PRT. After a few days, he settled in another pine.

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On 4 March, I noticed a change in the merlins’ behavior. Both were changing roosting trees, and the brown bird was occasionally taking flights around in the northeast corner of the cemetery. The gray bird did not go to the usual roost tree this evening, instead flying in to a big oak. While I was trying to photograph him in the tree, the brown bird flew in. The brown bird was startled by a couple of camera flashes, and flew off.

The next significant event came on 6 March. The gray bird was in the PRT and the brown bird was roosting in the east side of Section 91. After driving around looking for other merlins, I returned to find the brown bird in the gray bird’s PRT. Every few minutes, she would make a bowing motion and spread her tail feathers; then the gray bird would follow with the same type of bowing movement. Every other time they engaged in this behavior, the brown bird would give five or six chirping calls. This went on for 10 or 15 minutes. Finally, the brown bird flew off to her normal PRT. Had I observed courtship display?

On 18 March, while the gray bird and the brown bird were at their now-shared PRT, I observed yet another brown merlin, distinguishable from the others seen therebefore. This brought the total to four different merlins using the cemetery this winter.

The merlins became increasingly restless, straying more and more from the patterns they had been following for so many weeks. They were jumping from one PRT to another and taking flights around the cemetery, sometimes going far out but always flying right back. Was it time to go north, or even to nest?

The evening of 20 March brought a new development. I drove into the cemetery at the usual time and did not see any merlins. After a while, I went to look for the screech-owl that had been roosting in Section 11 on the west side of the cemetery. Taking the perimeter, I found no screech-owls, though I did locate the gray merlin. I returned to the east side, and there was the brown bird at the PRT. When I went back to check on the gray bird, he flew off and disappeared. Where did he go? Returning to the PRT, I found the brown bird had gone to roost. I suspect the gray bird had also.

On 25 March, I arrived later than usual and found the gray bird at his pine PRT. It was pouring rain but he perched there as if it were sunny and warm. It had been the brown bird’s habit to sit in the PRT until well after dark. Now the gray bird was staying out later. The brown bird did not show that night or any night thereafter. She had apparently gone north. The last time I observed her was on 24 March at 6:28 pm.

On 31 March the day was cold. We had partly sunny skies, snow flurries, and a temperature of 34°F. I made my way over to the Cemetery at 6:30 pm. The gray bird was in the pine PRT as usual. I sat watching him, wondering what day would be the last I would see this magnificent creature. His coloring had changed over the winter. The blue-gray of his feathers had deepened, as had the yellow-orange in his feet and legs. He was indifferent to my presence, unlike his brown counterpart who had never been quite at ease with people walking around under the PRT. He had allowed me to photograph him in his roost tree from a very short distance. He had given me a winter of excitement. While others were huddled in their houses, we were outside. I sometimes wondered why the merlins would sit in the top of the trees on the coldest, windiest days, when they could have easily flown to the roost tree out of the wind. I could tell which side of the tree he would use just by observing the flag. He always chose the side of the trunk away from the wind. At 7:00 pm the gray bird flew to the roost tree, about seven feet up in the Scotch pine he had used since I first laid eyes on him. After a few minutes, I walked closer to watch him, knowing my days with him were numbered. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later...the end of the winter merlin survey was close.

The first day of April brought south winds. He too must have gone north.
Fourteen Years of Shorebird Surveys near Western Lake Erie by Michael R. Bolton and John Szanto

Here we present small but fascinating excerpts from a massive database of shorebird observations from northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan. This trove, now including over 700,000 sightings, has been accumulated continuously since 1989 in weekly field trips by John Szanto of Toledo and Michael Bolton of Columbus, and has never been published, whole or in part. It comprises seasonal reports sent to the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences under the protocols of the International Shorebird Survey, and shared locally with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Ohio Division of Wildlife. Long-time field partners who self-effacingly describe themselves as birdwatchers and their method as opportunistic rather than scientific, Bolton and Szanto nevertheless have turned countless hours of dedicated field experience into a record of the area’s shorebirds unmatched for breadth and continuity.

Areas covered within the region varied each season, though the most productive shorebird spots—Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (ONWR), Pointe Mouillé State Game Area in Michigan, and Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area in Ohio (at least until the latter’s “improvement” in 1995) were most often covered. Bolton and Szanto are quick to say their censuses lack scientific rigor, but their valuable studies have been dedicated and prolonged in ways only enthusiastic amateurs can sustain. Rather than devoting reproducible coverage to the same locales, habitat types, or species, they are guided above all by their enthusiasm for shorebirds, whenever or wherever they may occur. Season by season they simply go where the birds are, or might be, identify them as to species, and count their numbers, including information on water levels, winds, disturbances, etc. for each location.

Untold hours spent afield over so many years lend special authority to their impressions. Asked about the most obvious decreases among species during the span of their work, they unhesitatingly cite that of the red knot, and mention that of sanderlings next. They regret the shortage of appropriate habitat for foraging migrant shorebirds in the region, especially in spring. Too often, they say, wildlife managers discipline the land into “teacups” of water, rather than “saucers”—shallower basins with gradients in depth and extensive muddy margins from which shorebirds and other organisms can benefit.

Asked about the best shorebird spot in the region, they nominate Pte. Mouillé, where actions taken by land managers to benefit shorebirds seem to have had a noticeable impact. This spot, it seems to them, may also be especially attractive to migrating shorebirds because of its location along a shoreline reassuringly parallel to their path. Similar factors may account for the huge numbers of migrant raptors following the same route in fall, relative to much smaller numbers seen only a few miles away in Ohio.

In their view, the most important change in observed shorebird numbers during the past decade has not arisen from any human intervention, but is part of a natural cycle. Lake Erie levels have fallen to near average in recent years, with positive effects on shorebird numbers, exposing foraging habitats at those few areas still open to natural fluctuations in water levels. During the past few years, numbers of birds counted in the undiked (hence susceptible to Lake levels) portions of the Clear Creek basin in ONWR have rivaled those at Pte. Mouillé in Michigan, and dwarfed those from other Ohio locations. Wind-driven fluctuations in water levels at remnant natural shorelines in the Western Basin are analogous to those of tides at coastal shorebird foraging sites, alternately recharging and exposing aquatic invertebrate prey.

Not included in their tables are sightings the pair has made during less formal forays, such as the sharp-tailed sandpiper observed on 2 December 1990 at Metzger Marsh, when bone-chilling winds were whipping snow by in horizontal streaks. Szanto and Bolton searched frantically for other birds nearby to witness this, Ohio’s second record of the species, but everyone else was apparently warm at home on such a day. Another inhospitable December day found them staring in disbelief at a piping plover walking the ice of the frozen bay at Maumee Bay State Park.

 Asked what lessons can be passed along from a decade and a half of observations, Bolton and Szanto urge birders to get out in the field as much as possible, and to leave roadside parking lots and viewing platforms to explore remoter and rougher habitats. Shorebirds, even huge numbers of them, can easily be overlooked, concealed from the casual eye in unexpected settings. Instead of regarding each species as a checkmark on a list, they urge us to go further, and report the birds’ actual presence by getting an accurate count. Too many shorebirders, they say, are swayed by spring fever in May, but go afield less often in the heat of July and August, when favorable winds, lower Lake levels, a wider variety of species, and much increased overall numbers make shorebirding ultimately more satisfying. Confidence in identifying these birds comes only from repeated observations, which in turn come from taking every advantage of the chance to leave home to walk their haunts. What else is the way of advice would you expect from two shorebird addicts?

Limited space prevents us from presenting more than a tiny fraction of the hundreds of pages of these data made available to the Cardinal. We have chosen here tables of shorebirds counted by month (Table 1) and year (Table 2) over the entire history of surveys at all Western Basin sites, and a table of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge survey results by year (Table 3), largely because ONWR results represent over 62% of all shorebirds sighted during the period. Censuses were not regularly conducted anywhere in January and February, and these months are therefore not included.

We invite readers to study these data on their own, but cannot resist calling attention to a few trends of apparent interest:

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• Overall numbers of birds seen have increased markedly in recent years, concurrent with more normal Lake Erie water levels, even though only a few sites are directly influenced by Lake levels, and despite the loss of Metzger Marsh WA as such. For example, note that ONWWR sites averaged 8,122 birds yearly during the first seven years of surveys and 50,787 yearly during the second seven years, when lower Lake water regularly exposed mudflats along Crane Creek and ONWWR managers increasingly came to value the habitat requirements of shorebirds and other non-game species.

• Sightings have also increased significantly among commoner species better to benefit from grasslands, drier margins of mudflats, and even some agricultural settings: American golden-plover, black-bellied plover, kildare, and pectoral sandpiper.

• Large yearly swings in total numbers likely reflect short-term habitat availability. For example, when dike construction in 1994 at the Turtle Creek unit of Magee Marsh WA incidentally produced mudflats there, 64%+ of that year's surveyed shorebird numbers came from that site alone.

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Table 1. 1989-2002 western Lake Erie shorebird survey results (by month) from Michael R. Bolton and John Szanto.

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**Table 2. 1989-2002 western Lake Erie shorebird survey results (by year) from Michael R. Bolton and John Szanto.**

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<th>Hudsonian Godwit</th>
<th>Western Sandpiper</th>
<th>Red-necked Phalarope</th>
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*This American woodcock allowed itself to be photographed at Kildeer Plains Wildlife Area in Wyandot County in March 2003.* Photo by Ron Sempier.
Recent Actions of the Ohio Bird Records Committee

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The Ohio Bird Records Committee exists to increase knowledge of Ohio's birdlife by validating records, maintaining archives for researchers of Ohio records of occurrences of rare bird species, and establishing the official list of Ohio bird species. The OBRC relies vitally on help from Ohio's field birders who send in details of their sightings of rare birds. Birds unsatisfactorily documented or not subjected to peer review by the Committee cannot be added to the official Ohio records, nor will they be attributed in the Ohio Cardinal. The OBRC establishes the Review List, which includes all species encountered infrequently enough in the state as to require documentation (specimen, photo, sound recording, and/or full written descriptions from witnesses) for their inclusion in the scientific record. As customary for a spring issue of the Cardinal, the full Review List appears at the end of this report.

The OBRC does not review sightings as such, of course, only documentations of sightings. The Committee cannot decide if a given species was seen and correctly identified, but only if the documentation made available from those present at the sighting verifies, for the historical record, the species' occurrence at the time. All documentations received, together with Committee actions thereon, are archived for researchers. All these records—with the sole exception of the identities of Committee members on vote sheets—are available to the public upon request of the Secretary.

Current members of the OBRC are Micki Dunakin (Antwerp), Joe Hammond (Columbus), Bob Harlan (Parma Heights), Ned Keller (Cleves), Jay Lehman (Cincinnati), Greg Links (Temperance, Michigan), Jim McCormac (Columbus), Kevin Metcalf (Chardon), Sue Tackett (Brookville), Elliot Tramer (Whitehouse), and Sean Zadar (Parma Heights). A summary of actions taken since the last published report follows. Names of observers submitting acceptable documentation are supplied in each case.

**Accepted Records**

In order to be accepted, records require a minimum of nine accept votes from the 11-member committee.

- **Northern Gannet Morus bassanus**—Lorain Harbor, Lorain County, 10 January 2003. Observer: John Pogacnik. This record comes right after last fall’s涌现, and is the 16th record since 1980.
- **Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus**—Lakeside Reservation, Lake County, 19 January 2003. Observer: John Pogacnik. There have been over 30 records in the last two decades, and this species may soon qualify for removal from the list of review species.

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Records in Recirculation

Records are recirculated when they have received from the Committee between six and eight votes to accept, or if any member requests recirculation.

Western Gull Larus occidentalis—Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, early March 2003.

Records Pending Review

We await details on some of these reports.

Tricolored Heron Egretta tricolor—Cuyahoga County, 16 April 2003.
Tricolored Heron E. tricolor—Washington County, 24 April 2003.
Glossy Ibis Plegadis falcinellus—Wayne County, 16 May 2003.
White-faced Ibis P. chihi—Sandusky County, 18 May 2003.
Whooper Swan Cygnus cygnus—Licking County, 16 April 2003.
Black Rail Laterallus jamaicensis—Holmes County, June 2003.
Piping Plover Charadrius melodus—Lucas County, 3 May 2003.
Least Tern Sterna antillarum—Ottawa County, 17 May 2003.
Common Raven Corvus corax—Cuyahoga County, 11 May 2003.
Yellow-rumped "Audubon's" Warbler Dendroica coronata auduboni—Franklin County, 4 April 2003. While technically not a review species, this record is being reviewed at the request of the OBRC secretary, as there is a possibility of this subspecies being re-split from the "Myrtle" warbler at some point in the future. There are only 3 or 4 Ohio records of this western subspecies.

Smith's Longspur Calidris pusilla—Tuscarawas County, 8 April 2003.

Notes from the OBRC Annual Meeting, Held 12 April 2003

Three new members were welcomed: Joe Hammond, Rob Harlan, and Sue Tackett. Thanks were given to outgoing members Dave Dister, Bernie Master, and Larry Rosche. Noted with sadness was the passing of member Cal Keppeler of Youngstown, who was a great asset to the birding community and the OBRC. The committee unanimously agreed to retain McCormac as Secretary for another year.

The Secretary reported that in the preceding year the OBRC reviewed 54 records, accepting 46 (85%), not accepting four records, with four records still ongoing in re-circulation. Thanks to a generous grant from the Master Family Fund, the OBRC was able to complete a new annotated checklist of Ohio birds in 2002, and print 3000 copies. Almost all of these have been distributed free of charge to birders in all parts of Ohio and at least 14 other states. Three new species were added to the state list in 2002: Calliope hummingbird, Eurasian collared-dove, and garganey, bringing the state list to 412 species.

A motion made by the Secretary to reduce the size of the committee from the current 11 members to seven was approved unanimously, and the reduction will be phased in over the next few years.

...continued on next page
The Review List as of 1 June 2003

This list includes (1) any species with no accepted record for Ohio (not enumerated here), (2) any species for which the known frequency of occurrence in Ohio is not greater than two individuals per year over the past 10 years, or (3) any recorded species for which the known frequency of occurrence in Ohio over the past 10 years is greater than two, but fewer than three, records per year, and determined for the list by a vote of the OBRC. This list is reviewed yearly by the Committee; while no species has been removed from the Review List over the past year, three species (garganey, Eurasian collared-dove, and Calliope hummingbird) have been added to the list below based on accepted records during the past year.

Pacific Loon
Western Grebe
Black-capped Petrel
Leach's Storm-Petrel
Northern Gannet
Brown Pelican
Anhinga
Magnificent Frigatebird
Tricolored Heron
White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Wood Stork
Fulvous Whistling-Duck
Ross's Goose
Trumpeter Swan
Cinnamon Teal
Garganey
Tufted Duck
King Eider
Common Eider
Barrow's Goldeneye
Swallow-tailed Kite
Mississippi Kite
Harris's Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
Gyrfalcon
Prairie Falcon
Yellow Rail
Black Rail
Purple Gallinule
Northern Lapwing
Snowy Plover
Wilson's Plover
Piping Plover
Black-necked Stilt
Spotted Redshank
Eskimo Curlew
Long-billed Curlew
Red-necked Stint
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
Curlew Sandpiper
Ruff
Eurasian Woodcock
Parasitic Jaeger
Long-tailed Jaeger
Black-headed Gull
Heermann's Gull
Mew Gull
California Gull
Ross's Gull
Ivory Gull
Royal Tern
Arctic Tern
Least Tern
Large-billed Tern
Thick-billed Murre
Black Guillemot
Long-billed Murrelet
Ancient Murrelet
Atlantic Puffin
Eurasian Collared-Dove
White-winged Dove
Common Ground-Dove
Smooth-billed Ani
Groove-billed Ani
Northern Hawk Owl
Burrowing Owl
Great Gray Owl
Boreal Owl
Calliope Hummingbird
Rufous Hummingbird
Red-cockaded Woodpecker
Black-backed Woodpecker
Gray Flycatcher
Say's Phoebe
Vermilion Flycatcher
Western Kingbird
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
Loggerhead Shrike
Black-billed Magpie
Common Raven
Violet-green Swallow
Boreal Chickadee
Brown-headed Nuthatch
Rock Wren
Bewick's Wren
Northern Wheatear
Mountain Bluebird
Townsend's Solitaire
Varied Thrush
Sprague's Pipit
Bohemian Waxwing
Black-throated Gray Warbler
Townsend's Warbler
Kirtland's Warbler
Swainson's Warbler
Painted Redstart
Western Tanager
Green-tailed Towhee
Spotted Towhee
Bachman's Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Lark Bunting
Baird's Sparrow
Harries's Sparrow
Smith's Longspur
Black-headed Grosbeak
Painted Bunting
Great-tailed Grackle
Bullock's Oriole
Brambling
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch
Pine Grosbeak
Houy Redpoll

Common terns were plentiful at Conneaut Harbor in Ashtabula County this spring. This one was photographed there on 15 May 2003 by Gary Meszaros.