

Buckeye Birding: America's Biggest Week! with Naturalist Journeys



May 10 – 17, 2023

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“... A ‘Peg trip’... bring[s] together people who like to explore new places and share the joy of finding new birds ... under the guidance of someone who knows the birds and the area. The accommodations are always excellent and special to the place we visit.”

— Maggie Clark



Join Naturalist Journeys on this spring migration tour to Ohio, a place that is quickly gaining recognition as one of North America's best places to bird during spring migration. Take part in the Biggest Week in American Birding Festival on the teeming shores of Lake Erie where, each spring, migrant songbirds, shorebirds, waders, and raptors pass through by the thousands on their way to Canada.

Northwest Ohio is unofficially the Warbler Capital of the World; Ohio is home to seven designated Globally Important Bird Areas (IBA). Over 325 species have been recorded here, with daily spring tallies reaching 120 species! While Canada's Point Pelee has long been the Great Lakes' star location, just across the lake, the Ohio shoreline (with its extensive wetlands and preserves) serves as the staging side before migrating birds head north. Crane Creek, Magee Marsh, and Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge are gems of this unique geography, and until now have been a long-kept secret. Today, the word is out and it's considered one of the top birding areas in the country.

Enjoy the popular Biggest Week in American Birding Festival while expert local guide Dan Donaldson helps you avoid the crowds and find the hot spots. Dan lives and works in the region and we are fortunate to have him share his contacts and expertise.

Tour Highlights

- Attend festival activities and talks, plus enjoy optional festival field trips
- Explore the famous Magee Marsh Boardwalk, swarming with feasting migrants, some at arm's length!
- Bird the upland scrub-shrub forests and marshes of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge
- Visit Oak Openings Metro Park, home to 80% of Ohio's endangered species
- Explore Kelley's Island and its stunning example of glacial grooves
- Discover Marblehead Island and its beautiful and endangered Lakeside Daisy
- Watch a bird-banding demonstration at Black Swamp Bird Observatory
- Stay right at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge, where the festival's events occur

Tour Summary

8-Day / 7-Night Spring Migration Birding Tour

\$3,190 DBL / \$3,690 SGL, from Cleveland, Ohio

Airport is Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Wed., May 10 Arrive in Cleveland | Downtown Lake Front Birding

Please plan to arrive no later than 2:00 PM at the Cleveland International Airport. Please plan to take our hotel's free airport shuttle to the hotel. Drop your bags at the hotel, freshen up, and then depart for some afternoon birding in the downtown lakefront areas of Cleveland. These green islands and lakeside woodlots are often very productive for birds and offer interesting views of the city.

We then enjoy dinner at a fun restaurant in one of the up and coming "hipster" Cleveland neighborhoods before return to our hotel in time to relax and settle in before our first morning of birding tomorrow.

Accommodations at the Hilton Garden Inn Cleveland Airport, Cleveland (D)

Thurs., May 11 Cuyahoga Valley National Park | Cleveland Local Patch Birding

This morning, after breakfast at our Cleveland hotel, we depart early for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park where we explore for woodland bird species that we are unlikely to see in the western marsh areas of Ohio. We bird a very mature beaver marsh where thick vegetation can produce many warblers, and perhaps our best chance for

Yellow-throated Warbler, River Otter, and a good variety of waterfowl and water birds. We also visit a heron rookery that offers terrific views and photo opportunities of over 60 nests, many with chicks by this time.

We enjoy lunch in the historic town of Peninsula and then stop at the park visitor center for some local history, national park stamps, and more birding along the famous Tow Path Trail. We spend the afternoon working our way back to Cleveland for some late afternoon birding, another wonderful local dinner, and perhaps a sunset at one of Cleveland's wonderful lakefront parks.

Accommodations at Cleveland Hotel (B,L,D)

Fri., May 12 Travel to Magee Marsh & Ohio's Biggest Week Birding Festival

We enjoy breakfast at our hotel and then depart for Western Ohio and the Maumee Bay State Park and Lodge where we spend the rest of our week. The lodge also happens to be the headquarters for the Biggest Week in American Birding Festival. Today is casual, guide's choice for locations. If the winds are favorable and they're having a good day on the Magee Marsh Boardwalk we make a quick stop on our way.

Otherwise, we go directly to the lodge, have lunch, settle in, and do some afternoon birding at the many great habitats available at the lodge. The festival is also in full swing with vendors and exhibits to enjoy. Tonight we enjoy dinner at the lodge.

Accommodations at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., May 13 Magee Marsh | Ottawa Marsh | Maumee Bay State Park

We use today to orientate ourselves to the area by jump-starting our birding with a walk on the Magee Marsh boardwalk. While the boardwalk can be busy with other birders, it is always rewarding. See 15+ warbler species including Cape May, Blackburnian, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, and Canada Warblers, plus Black-billed Cuckoo, both Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrush, and American Redstart.

After lunch we explore the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), 6,700 acres of protected Lake Erie marshes and upland scrub-shrub forests. We make a quick stop in the new, LEED-Certified visitor center, then drive the auto tour through many of the wetland units. Trumpeter Swan were reintroduced here in the late 1990s, and these swans are easy to identify by their bright, orange-red necks and heads, stained from the water's high iron content. We take time to seek out shorebirds and waterfowl, including Blue-winged Teal, both Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, and Wood Duck, plus Bald Eagle, and even Great Horned Owl (many years we see young owls being reared in vacant Bald Eagle nests — what a treat!).

Accommodations at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., May 14 Oak Openings | Metzger Marsh

Today we venture west of the Lake Erie marsh region to visit the Oak Openings region of Ohio. An ancient sand dune area, Oak Openings boasts nearly 80% of the state's rare and endangered species. This unique dune and wetland complex creates a habitat that replicates the oak savannas and sand barren areas far into the Midwest. Here we hope to spot Lark and other sparrows, both Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, and Hooded, Pine, and Yellow-throated Warblers, and we may even see Eastern Meadowlark.

After lunch, we head to Pearson Metropark to explore the newly-created Metzger Marsh, part of a large wetland restoration project. Common finds include Marsh Wren and Least, Spotted, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. We also network with other guides and experts to monitor the migration, so as activity calls, we follow!

Accommodations at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge (B,L,D)

Mon., May 15 Kelley's Island & Catawba Island | East Harbor State Park | Evening at Magee Marsh Boardwalk

We begin the day with a ferry trip to Kelley's Island. Kelley's Island offers unique habitats for birding, interesting

cultural history, and North America's best example of glacial grooves. After a late lunch we head back to the mainland and bird the under birded areas surrounding Sandusky Bay and Catawba Island. We visit Marblehead and if we're lucky, we may catch the endangered Lakeside Daisy in abundant bloom. We keep our eyes out for Mississippi Kite, as well as other species. While we're here, we make sure to stop at the picturesque Marblehead Lighthouse.

We move on to East Harbor State Park, where we're sure to spot Great Blue Heron in the bays, and forest dwellers like Scarlet Tanager and Red-eyed Vireo along the park's woodland trails.

Depending on how productive the day has been, we head back to Magee Marsh Boardwalk for an evening check in; birds are (almost) a guarantee here — we like to check often!

Accommodations at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge (B,L,D)

Tues., May 16 Magee Marsh | Ottawa Marsh | Metzger Marsh

We spend our last day of birding focusing on the Magee Marsh Boardwalk. We start early and leave our options open to pick up any warblers and passerines we haven't seen earlier in the week. Although the boardwalk may be busy, we can hope that another wave of new species arrived overnight. Spot Cerulean, possible Kirtland's, and Blackpoll Warblers; Scarlet Tanager; Willow, Alder, and Least Flycatchers; Eastern Kingbird; and Eastern Wood-pewee.

We make quick stops at Ottawa NWR and Metzger Marsh again in hopes of picking up a few more species, then head back to the lodge early for a little down time (or festival time — your choice). Tonight we enjoy a final dinner together at one of Dan's favorite restaurants, The Beirut, famous for fresh, authentic Lebanese food.

Accommodations at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., May 17 Departures

A great week of birding comes to an end. Please make your airline reservations to depart after 12:00 PM. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the tour is **\$3,190 DBL / \$3,690 SGL**, per person based on double occupancy from Cleveland, Ohio. The cost includes seven nights' accommodation, all meals as noted in the itinerary, last day airport transfer, land and boat transportation during the journey, professional guide services, park and other entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Not included in the tour cost is round-trip airfare to and from Cleveland, personal expenses such as laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, and gratuities for luggage handling or other services. Guide gratuities are at your discretion.

Tour Notes & Pace

Weather and wind direction greatly impact bird migration and which locations offer the best birding for the day. Our goal is to visit all the locations and more during the trip, but days and locations will be arranged to accommodate the weather and local conditions.

Dining is casual at restaurants that feature regional foods, some picnic lunches, and a few restaurants that feature some international flair.

Pace is moderate; full days of birding and walks on sometimes wet, but established roads and trails; a typical walk is half a mile to two miles. You can opt to return to the hotel on several days if you would like a lighter pace.

Travel Information

Airport is Cleveland Hopkins International Airport (CLE), Ohio. Plan to arrive no later than 2:00 PM on May 10; plan to take the hotel's free shuttle from the airport to the hotel. Please schedule flights to depart after 12:00 PM on May 17.

Photo Credits

Chestnut-sided Warbler, Terry Peterson (TP); American Woodcock, Mahlon Hale (MH); Prothonotary Warbler, Ruth Guillemette; Baltimore Oriole, MH; Mississippi Kite, Steve Wolfe (SW); Rose-breasted Grosbeak, MH; Golden-winged Warbler, Tom Dove.

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