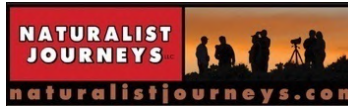
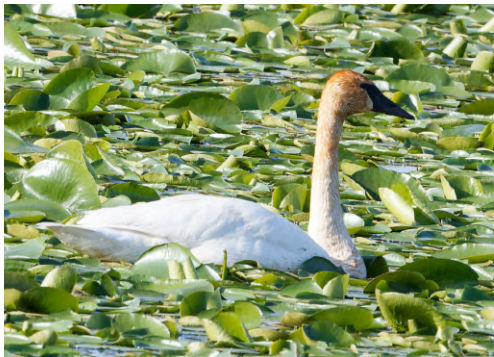


Ohio's Biggest Week in Birding | May 8–15, 2024 | Trip Report | by Dan Donaldson



Guides Dan Donaldson and Kent Skaggs with participants Lori, Brian, Lorraine, Craig, Thomas, Kate, Christine, Rich, Suzanna and Paul



Wed., May 8

Arrival Day | Rocky River Reservation | Cleveland Lakefront Birding

It's arrival day! Participants arrived either the day before or throughout the day. We got everyone settled into our hotel near the airport and then headed out for some local patch birding. Our first stop was Cleveland Metropark's Rocky River Reservation. This is a long linear park that follows the Rocky River through steep gorges, running from the Portage Escarpment to the south to Lake Erie. The Rocky River Nature Center was a great starting point. Here, we reviewed the geology and biology of the park before setting out for our first birds of the trip. From the nature center observation deck overlooking the river, we observed both Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, Rough-winged Swallows busily excavating nesting cavities in the seams of the shale walls, and a flyby Black Vulture (an unexpected bird for this trip) that overshot its migration north. Yellow-throated



Vireos were actively calling and we had great looks of them when they descended from the treetops to feed along the wetland trail. 37 species here to start our trip.

Next, we headed to Cleveland for dinner, but not without a stop at Wendy Park on the shoreline of Lake Erie, a favorite local birding patch where most any bird can show up. We first walked along the Cuyahoga River (an industrial shipping channel here) where we picked up both White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows. Caspian Terns were actively feeding in the channel, giving us great looks in the evening sun. Swallows were active here as well with Bank, Tree, Northern Rough-winged, and Barn Swallows a constant presence overhead. We came upon a small feeding flock of warblers in the woodlot and had nice closeup views of Cape May, Northern Parula, Palm and Yellow Warblers. Baltimore Orioles nest in the many Cottonwood trees here and several had arrived and were staking their territorial claims.

Dinner was nearby at The Harp – a favorite Irish Pub.

Thurs., May 9 Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Today we visited several locations within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. We were much further upstream from the shipping channel, where the Cuyahoga is a free-flowing natural river. Its broad valley here produces a wide flat expanse for floodplain forests, meadows, and wetlands.

Our first stop was Station Road, a way station and park on the Cuyahoga Scenic Railway. We stopped here for a couple of quest birds usually seen just at this location on the Ohio trip -- Yellow-throated Warbler and Cerulean Warbler. We found a Yellow-throated right in the parking lot and dipped on the Ceruleans. Nevertheless, we had a great bird outing here. Common Mergansers nest along the river here and we had a female fly by us several times this morning. Nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers were one of the stars of the morning. They were nesting in a wetland snag right near the trail for great observations and photos. Woodland birds were the focus this morning, with 39 species observed including many Warbling Vireos, Red-eyed Vireos, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted-titmice, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, many Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Eastern Towhees, Scarlet Tanagers, and Indigo Buntings.

After a quick stop at a picnic area where we picked up Gray-cheeked Thrushes and Tennessee Warblers, we headed to one of the most accessible Great Blue Heron rookeries in the state. Many of the chicks were quite large by now, making for very crowded and noisy nests.



The weather was turning and at our next stop, the Ira Road Beaver Marsh, we ended up birding in a downpour. The hike was quick with limited birding. We opted for an early lunch in Historic Peninsula, a town that grew up from a canal, then later a railroad, stop on the transportation lines from industrial Akron to Lake Erie. We waited out the weather back at the hotel, and then took a quick driving tour in downtown Cleveland before an amazing dinner at La Dolce Vita, in the Little Italy neighborhood in Cleveland.

Fri., May 10 **Cleveland Birding | Travel to Maumee Bay State Park**

We started our morning in the center of downtown Cleveland at the Erie Street Cemetery where the birding was light, but we had a very cooperative Ovenbird that made the stop worth it. A life bird for some on the trip, we watched this Ovenbird walk along the grounds of the historic stone walls that line the cemetery, jumping up and scaling the walls to glean insects. We moved on to Cleveland Lakefront Nature Park, a former dredge disposal facility that has turned into a green island that juts out into Lake Erie's coast. The birding was much better here with 46 species. We picked up more warblers -- Nashville, American Redstart, Magnolia, and Black-throated Blue. Wood Thrush was a nice addition and a Blue-headed Vireo gave us several close encounters as it worked low in the brush along the edge of the compound and Lake Erie.

Next, we travelled to Maumee Bay State Park and Lodge, where we'll spend the next 5 nights. We settled into our rooms and met up at 4:00 to participate in our first Biggest Week in American Birding Festival event, a wonderful keynote presentation by Jennifer Ackerman, author of a new book titled *What Owls Know*. Afterwards, we headed to an early dinner at the lodge dining room, allowing us to go for a sunset bird walk along the nearby boardwalk and shores of Lake Erie. Bald Eagles are plentiful here, but the star of the evening was a pair of Prothonotary Warblers that was nesting along the boardwalk, paying us no attention as they went about their business, often ranging within feet of us.

A special treat late in the evening was a chance to view the northern lights. Barely viewable by the naked eye from this location, long exposure photos from our phones produced images that were more reminiscent of typical northern lights shows.

Sat., May 11 **Our first day of birding in the Magee Marsh Area**

We participated in a festival outing this morning and did some celebrity birding with Kim Kaufman and Jennifer Ackerman at nearby Pearson Metropark. We started at the wonderful window on wildlife they have there and



then birded the woodland trails through the few remaining remnants of the Great Black Swamp, which is another name for a beautiful, forested wetland. The trails were alive with birds and we saw very cooperative Swainsons and Wood Thrushes working the forest floor. A Black-throated Green Warbler was busily gleaning insects from grape vines hanging by the trail just feet away from us, too close for some camera lenses. Other birds included Ovenbirds, Northern Water Thrushes, American Redstarts, Northern Parulas and Chestnut-sided Warblers.

Back at the lodge, we had great views of a resting Common Nighthawk that wasn't getting much rest as it picked a pretty windy perch and spent quite a bit of time changing position in the swaying branches.

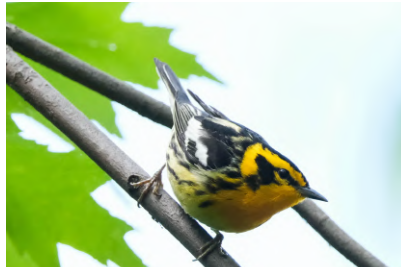
Lunch was at the famous Blackberry Corners, where the Lifer Pie was born. Afterwards, we headed to the Magee Marsh Boardwalk.

Magee Marsh, - A 15 Warbler afternoon. We added a Snowy Egret to the trip while driving the marsh dikes back to the Magee Marsh boardwalk. Being a Saturday, it was a busy day on the boardwalk, but it was an exciting busy, as the warblers were there and still active in the afternoon. I believe we had 6 species of warbler in the first 100 feet of boardwalk. American White Pelicans are becoming more common here in the Spring, but the crowd still oohed when 3 adults flew just overhead. Trumpeter Swans flew by the trail often and their calls are heard most of the time on the boardwalk. Eastern Screech Owls were day-roosted right along the boardwalk today, causing a group of birders and photographers to stake out there most of the day.

Our afternoon warblers included Black and White, many Prothonotary, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Cape May, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Palm, Yellow-rumps, Black-throated Green, and Canada.

Sun., May 12 Magee Marsh Boardwalk | Oak Openings

The weather and winds looked very favorable last night for warbler migration, so we headed straight to the Magee Marsh Boardwalk this morning. We walked the boardwalk in search of new migrants. We quickly picked up a Mourning Warbler near the entrance of the boardwalk. Black and White Warblers arrived overnight as well, with several individuals working along the boardwalk. We picked up 14 species of warbler in our first two hours.



Flycatchers moved in last night as well with Alder, Least, Eastern Phoebe, and Eastern Kingbirds all present along the boardwalk.

After lunch, we headed to Oak Openings on the west side of Toledo. This is a wonderful oak savanna in a region of ancient sand dunes and lake bottoms. The habitats range from wetland forests to dry dune habitats that support prairie plants and even Prickly Pear Cacti. The area is actively managed by fire here which continuously creates new habitat. We were there to appreciate the diverse habitats and look for a few species of birds that are found nowhere else in the region. Our first stop was at large grass fields on Sagertown Road near the Toledo Airport. We picked up our quest bird here, Grasshopper Sparrow. We located several singing from tall grasses and small shrubs. Field Sparrows, Savannah Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks were here in good numbers too, as expected.

Next, we travelled to nearby Girdam Road to scan the vegetated dune habitats for Lark Sparrows, who prefer small dunes with blown out vegetation. We spotted several Lark Sparrows, both in the dunes but also making flights to across the road to fresh new fields that were burned around 2 years ago. Orchard and Baltimore Orioles love these open habitats, and we found each in this area as well. Yellow-throated Vireos were heard and seen very well along the mature, burned oak forest edge. Pine Warblers were found in the same area.

Dinner was at Lucky's Barn and Grill, known for great barbeque and funky appetizers.

Mon., May 13 Magee Marsh Boardwalk

It was a beautiful sunny morning and we were back in the Magee Marsh Boardwalk area, this time on the Estuary trail along the beach and to the outlet of Crane Creek. Lake Erie was glass-flat and the midges were active in the sun along the shrubby vegetation behind the beach. Great for birds! About 20 Trumpeter Swans were gathered behind the tree line and we heard their calls all morning. Over Lake Erie and along the shore we had great looks at Spotted Sandpipers, Killdeer, Common Terns, American White Pelicans and a flyby Northern Harrier, all brilliantly lit up in the morning sun. All the midges had attracted the birds and warblers and flycatchers were actively feeding. No new species of warblers for us, but the morning sun gave us wonderful lighting conditions.



Back on the boardwalk, Bay-breasted Warblers and American Redstarts had moved in overnight and were here in good numbers. A Sharp-shinned Hawk made several runs along the boardwalk in hopes of a quick breakfast. It couldn't flush anyone out of the vegetation and eventually flew off to the west. Philadelphia Vireo had arrived as well, with a couple found feeding together along the loop trail.

After lunch, we headed to Pipe Creek Wildlife Area. The birding is good here right in the parking lot and around the nearby maintenance building. Here we had good looks at a Hooded Warbler that ended up singing all afternoon and Prothonotary Warblers that seemed to have nested somewhere along the aluminum building. We walked out onto the dikes in search of waterfowl and had wonderful observations comparing Forster's vs. Common Terns. We even had a few juvenile Bonaparte's Gulls added in for further species comparisons.

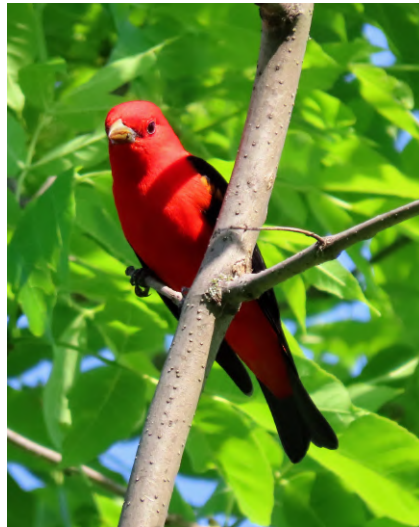
We had dinner at the lodge this evening so we could spend the evening out on the grounds observing American Woodcock flights at sunset. While we staged in the archery range waiting for the woodcocks we had an amazing Whippoorwill flyby. So Close! After observing six or seven flights, we quietly made our way back to the parking lot. A pair of nearby Screech Owls entertained us with both their whinny and trill calls.

Tues., May 14 Maumee Bay State Park | Magee Marsh | Ottawa NWR

We had a little later breakfast this morning, since we were out late watching woodcocks.

We headed back to Magee Marsh for a quick walk along the boardwalk before heading out on a driving tour at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Two pairs of Green Herons had nested 20 feet off the boardwalk to the delight of birders and photographers. The warblers were still there, and we added Wilson's Warbler to our list of 14 warbler species we saw this morning. Vireos were well represented today with Blue-headed, Warbling, and Red-eyed all working the same Dawn Redwood Trees. Add a Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the mix and it was a great morning on the boardwalk.

After lunch on the patio at the Ottawa NWR Visitor Center, we walked the nearby trail back in the flooded woodlot. There are several Purple Martin colonies here and Martins were ever-present here, calling above our heads. We had a nice flyby pair of Sandhill Cranes, Great-crested Flycatchers, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, and good looks at Indigo Bunting. A special treat was a pair of Sedge Wrens that were apparently setting up a nesting territory along one of the dike roads. They were actively chasing each other, singing, and carrying nesting materials.



It was our last night of the trip, so we headed back to the lodge in the afternoon to pack up and get ready for our last dinner together at the famous Beirut restaurant in Toledo. We enjoyed everything from traditional Lebanese to Italian and American fare. Over a glass of wine, we talked about our favorite parts of the trip, favorite birds and surprisingly amazing birding locations.

Wed., May 15 **Maumee Bay State Park | Departures**

Some folks went out on the lodge's boardwalk this morning and were successful in getting better looks at Virginia Rails than we'd seen on earlier walks, and we added a Sora Rail in for good measure.

Back at the lodge, we had a nice full breakfast, loaded up the vans and made our way to the Cleveland Airport.

Photos: Birding Magee Marsh (Craig Granlund - CG), Prothonotary Warbler (Paul Edelman - PE), Trumpeter Swan (PE), Blackpoll Warbler (CG), Scarlet Tanager (Kent Skaggs - KS), Eastern Bluebird (CG), Common Muskrat (CG), Caspian Tern (CG), female Baltimore Oriole (PE), Eastern Phoebe (CG), Solitary Sandpiper (CG), Yellow-throated Warbler (PE), Red-headed Woodpecker (PE), Red-bellied Woodpecker (CG), Cape May Warbler (PE), Peregrine Falcon (CG), Gray-cheeked Thrush (PE), Black-throated Green Warbler (CG), American Goldfinch (CG), Great Blue Heron (KS), Black-throated Blue Warbler (PE), Magee Marsh Boardwalk (KS), Blackburnian Warbler (CG), Common Nighthawk (PE), Yellow Warbler (PE), Baltimore Oriole (CG), Birding Magee Marsh (CG), Bald Eagle (KS), Lake Erie Shoreline (KS), White Pelican (PE), Scarlet Tanager (KS), American Redstart (PE), Painted Turtles (KS), Chestnut-sided Warbler (KS)