

# Ohio's Big Week Trip Report

## May 7 – 13, 2017 with Guide Dan Donaldson

139 Species of Birds | 22 Species of Warblers

Photos by Maggie Clark, Mahlon Hale, Ruth Guillemette, and Dan Donaldson.



### Mon., May 8 Orientation Day — Magee Marsh, Ottawa NWR & Metzger Marsh

With our group arriving the afternoon before, this was our first full day of birding and we spent the day orienting ourselves to the region and making short visits to the varied birding locations we plan on visiting the rest of the week. Our first stop was the famous Magee Marsh Boardwalk. We spent only a couple hours here and while the boardwalk was quite busy with visitors, we had many great looks at our first 9 warbler species: Black and White, Common Yellowthroat, Oven Bird, Northern Parula, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Palm, Pine, and Yellow-rumped.

After lunch at Blackberry Corners, the local and practically only corner tavern, we visited Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, which boasts 6,700 acres of protected/managed Lake Erie marshes and upland scrub-shrub forests. After a quick stop in the new, LEED-certified visitor center, we drove the auto tour through many of the wetland units, each managed individually to maximize diversity within the Refuge. Trumpeter Swans were reintroduced here in the late 1990s and their trumpeting calls are a welcome sound in the region. Resident swans were easy to identify as their necks and heads are stained bright orange/red from the high organic content of the water here. The big draw for birders at the Refuge this time of year is the shorebirds and while the birding was light today, we did have great looks at Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Bald Eagles, Dunlin and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and a flyover Osprey in one the larger wetland units.

Next, we headed to nearby Metzger Marsh. With prevailing north winds, the shorebirding was challenging, but along the pier, Lake Erie's crashing waves kept fisherman away and a large flock of Common Tern mixed with Caspian and Forster's Terns and Bonaparte's Gull used the area to rest. In the nearby marsh, we were treated to a persistently calling Least Bittern. A short walk along a large dike,



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produced a second and third Least Bittern — some of the best views many of us will likely ever have of this secretive species.

We checked off our first 82 species of the trip, including 9 warbler species.

### **Tues., May 9**

We were joined for the day by Pat Lueders of Naturalist Journeys and Martyn Kenefick from Trinidad and the author of *Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*. Our ferry trip over to Kelley's Island was quite enjoyable on a calm Lake Erie. On the island, our first destination was the Glacial Grooves Geological Preserve, which also happens to be a wonderful birding area, too, with wooded and open areas. After touring and birding the grooves, we birded the nearby Kelley's Island State Park and an abandoned limestone quarry. The large bay at the state park produced a lone Common Loon just offshore in Lake Erie.

After lunch at the Village Pump, we headed to the northern tip of the island to the area known as Long Point and the Jones Nature Preserve. These protected areas feature unique habitats of the islands with cedar groves and Hackberry forests and gave us our first views of Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, and Orange-crowned, Nashville, Cape May, and Black-throated Green Warblers of the week.

Today, we added 16 species to our trip list, bringing our total to 98 species of birds, including 5 new warblers.



### **Wed., May 10**

First, we took an early stop at the Magee Marsh boardwalk to catch any new migrants that may have

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appeared overnight. On our way there, the drive along the dike to the boardwalk produced Sandhill Crane, Common Gallinule, and another Osprey in the wetlands. Our challenging north winds persisted and with good birding reports in other areas, we headed to Toledo Metroparks' Pearson Creek. This park has a large tract of mature forest and newly added wetland/marsh tracts, making it a great alternative to the busy boardwalk at Magee.

In the picnic area at Pearson Creek Metropark, we ate a wonderful lunch of leftovers from our dinner the evening before at the Beirut. Afterward, we spent some time at the Window on Wildlife at the visitor center and birded the landscaped and forested areas of the park. The adjacent marsh and wetland areas were loaded with hidden, but singing, Marsh Wren and we added Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers and Sora in the open water areas. A trailside Least Sandpiper offered incredibly close views and photo opportunities. We returned to the lodge in the afternoon and walked the boardwalk trails at Maumee Bay and located a nesting Screech Owl that we visited several times throughout the week. A Clay-colored Sparrow was also seen by several in the group in the parking lot of the lodge right before dinner.

On this day, we added another 16 species, bringing our total to 114 with 20 warbler species.

### Thurs., May 11

Again, accompanied by Martyn Kenefick, we headed west of Toledo to the Oak Openings Region of Ohio. Oak Openings is an ancient sand dune area that boasts nearly 80% of Ohio's rare and endangered species. This unique dune and wetland complex creates rare habitats here in Ohio that replicate the oak savannas and sand barren areas located far out in the mid-west. Our target birds for this area were Lark Sparrow, Summer and Scarlet Tanager, and Red-headed Woodpecker. Scarlet Tanager and Red-headed Woodpecker were found in abundance in the oak savannas. Lark Sparrow were present,

but presented challenging views at first. One individual in dunes along the roadside finally gave us incredible views and photo opportunities. Henslow's Sparrow were calling from the nearby grasses along the road, but we just couldn't get a good look at one.

Fire is used regularly to manage the forests here at the Oak Openings and the open savannah woods enabled us to easily spot Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, and other sparrows.



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The nearby Toledo Airport has a large overrun safety area that is maintained as grassland fields and low shrub-scrub habitats and these shrub habitats are great areas for Blue-winged Warbler. We had terrific looks at them while walking along Sager Road. The grasslands at the end of the runway are the most reliable spot in the area for Grasshopper Sparrow and we had very good looks at several individuals there, along with Eastern Meadowlark.

We lunched at the famous Tony Paco's in Toledo (featured in the TV show M.A.S.H.). After returning to the lodge, we spent the late afternoon in woods and marshes at Maumee Bay State Park. We were treated to a very large mixed flock of thrushes working the wooded wetlands along the boardwalk. At times, we had Veery, and Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes in our binoculars at the same time.



After dinner at the lodge and the sun had set, we visited a reliable spot on the grounds at Maumee for viewing American Woodcock performing their spring breeding flights. We were not disappointed as we found an individual male on territory that allowed for very close viewing and photo opportunities.

By the end of Thursday, our trip list was up to 124 birds with 10 new species added.

### **Fri., May 12 A 17 Warbler Day!**

We headed east to avoid crowds and bird the under-birded areas around Sandusky Bay and Catawba Island on Friday morning. The open bay areas of East Harbor State Park provided good looks at a Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, and Double-crested Cormorant. The bayside nature trails, while flooded, offered great views of warblers, orioles, and our first looks at Brown Thrasher.

After lunch, we took the opportunity to stop at the iconic Marblehead lighthouse, positioned atop a limestone outcrop. This visit boasted classic Lake Erie shoreline views and great photo opportunities.

Meadowbrook Park is one of the newest parks in the area and proved to be a very productive location. Walking the meadows and young forests, we enjoyed eye level views of Willow Flycatchers, Magnolia and Palm Warblers. This was exciting as we saw 17 species of warblers on Friday!

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We added 15 species including 2 warblers on Friday bringing our trip total to 139 birds for the trip with 22 species of warblers. What a great trip list!!

### **Sat., May 13 Depart for Cleveland International Airport**

After breakfast and one last review of our bird list, our group exchanged contact information and prepared for departure.