

# Ohio's Biggest Week in Birding | Trip Report

## May 14-21, 2022 | by Dan Donaldson



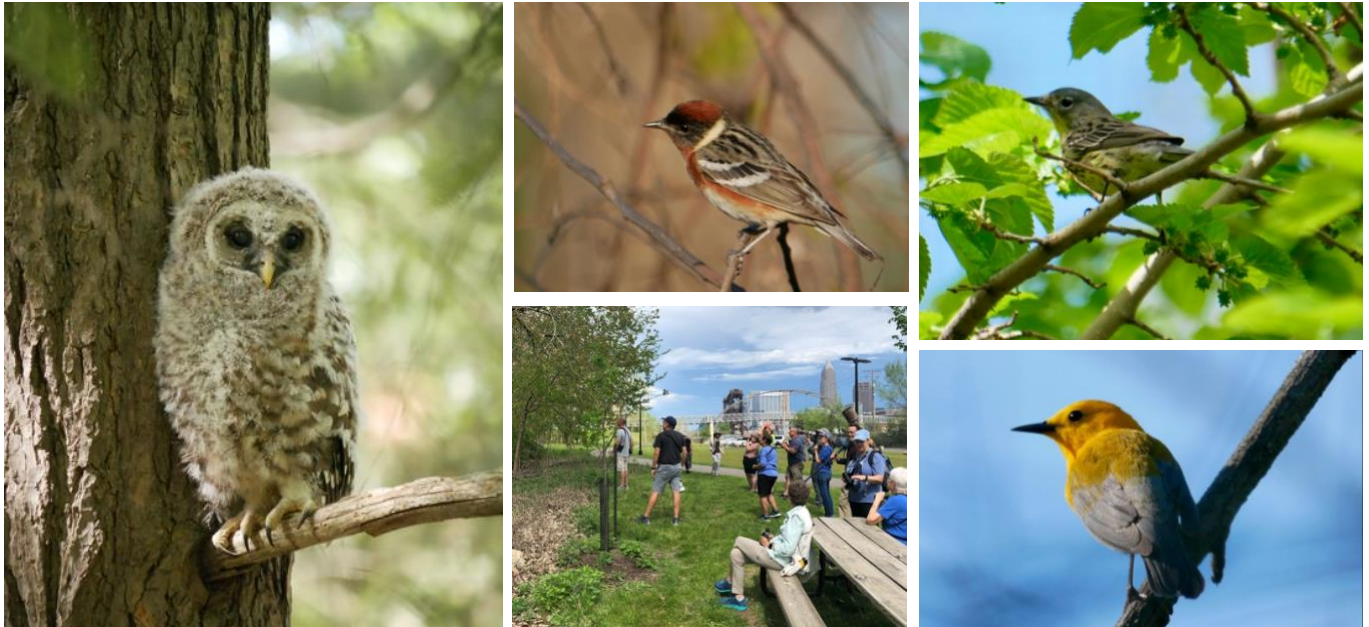
**With guides, Dan Donaldson and Andy Jones and participants Barb, Beth, Betsy, Carol, Deirdre, DJ, Eva, Gay, Henry, Leigh, Letty, Patricia and Sue.**



**Sat., May 14**

### **Wendy Park | Lake Erie Science and Nature Center**

Cleveland is an easy destination with lodging right by the airport, so we were able to settle into our rooms and be ready to bird by midafternoon. POW! – Kirtland's Warbler! While gathering at the hotel for our afternoon birding session we received a report of a Kirtland's Warbler in one of the Downtown Cleveland's best birding patches, Wendy Park. Situated at the mouth of the Cuyahoga entering Lake Erie, this small metro park seems to always get special birds during migration. We found the Kirtland's almost immediately at the location reported. Great views of this female working the woodland edge. A nice characteristic of this species, other than being large for a warbler, is that during migration, once they find a woodlot they tend to stay and feed in the same location all day. This bird was actively feeding the entire time, right alongside a Yellow-bellied flycatcher, and presumably, moved on to its breeding grounds in Michigan that evening. We then drove to the Lake Erie Science and Nature Center in Bay Village and home to the Lights Out Cleveland program. Here we located a family of Barred Owls and had incredible close looks and pictures of the adults and chicks. Later we met up with the Lights out Cleveland group and our group participants were able to release some of the birds that had recovered from window strikes that morning. We had great looks at Bay-breasted and Black-throated Green warblers at this location as well. Add those to the Kirtland's, Magnolia, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, and Palm warblers seen at Wendy Park and we had an incredible start to this trip. Dinner was at the Mellow Mushroom restaurant.



**Sun., May 15**

### **Cuyahoga Valley National Park | Maumee Bay State Park**

We spent the day birding in the Cleveland area today, specifically at the nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park, CVNP. We spent most of our time at the Station Road Towpath Trail, a great birding location and a reliable location for Yellow-throated and Cerulean warblers. Both species can be difficult to find in the western marshes, so we worked hard to find them and here. We were successful in finding both practically in the same mature Sycamore tree. We observed 50 species of bird, including Ruby-throated hummingbirds, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Baltimore Orioles actively building nests. Nearby Orchard Orioles were probably nest-building as well, but we could not locate it in the grape tangle they were spending their time in. Other standouts at this location include Broad-winged Hawk, Common Mergansers (breeding here again thanks to removal of a dam), Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Scarlett Tanagers. We then moved on to a large Great-blue Heron Rookery at Bath Rd. This rookery has been active for over 20 years. The herons breed early in Ohio and the young in the nests were quite large already. It was warm this morning and the large pterodactyl-looking nestlings were restless and panting as they waited for their parents return with food.

We lunched in the historic town of Peninsula at the Winking Lizard Pub, visited the Conservancy for the Cuyahoga Valley National Park gift shop where participants got their CVNP stamps for their National Park Passports and picked up t-shirts and gifts. We then departed for Maumee Bay State Park and Lodge, where we spent the rest of the week. Arriving late in the afternoon, we check in, get settled and meet for a quick bird walk around the lodge before dinner. Large numbers of Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins were actively feeding in the evening light, with our standout bird for the walk being a Merlin that buzzed low over the lodge heading west along the lakeshore.

### **Mon., May 16                      Magee Marsh | Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge**

This was our first full day in Western Ohio. We were up early and those that were interested went on a pre-breakfast bird walk. The areas around the lodge's nature center make excellent birding spots early in the cool



mornings, as they get very hot and sunny in the afternoon. Wouldn't you know, a Kirtland's showed up here as well. It was a great morning with Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted and Magnolia warblers present too. Orientation Day – We used today to orient ourselves to the region by visiting many of the locations we'll be spending much more time at the rest of the week. Of course, we head straight to the famous Magee Marsh Boardwalk. We arrived late morning, but the boardwalk didn't disappoint as we tallied 12 warbler species in just 2 hours on the boardwalk. With Prothonotary Warblers singing and nesting just feet off the boardwalk (actually in one of the boardwalk posts), Blackpolls singing low in the trees, and incredible looks at Cape May, Black-throated Blue, and the fire throated Blackburnian warblers our morning was a total success.

We ate lunch at the infamous Black Berry Corners café and then made our way to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. The marsh areas in western Ohio are a patchwork of state, local, and federal properties that are all working in concert to manage thousands of acres of wetlands in the region. Ottawa features a wonderful modern nature center (Leed Certified Gold), great trails through several forest habitats and marshes and Ohio's best wetland driving tour. After a quick stop in the nature center, we walked out into the forest trails and immediately was rewarded with a resting Common Nighthawk. We have several wonderful nighthawk experiences on this trip. This nighthawk flushed from a nearby roosting perch and gave the group good looks from a nearby perch. The wet woods along the trails are perfect habitat for thrushes and today it was for Swainson's thrushes. We just quit counting thrushes and Swamp Sparrows, Robins and Cedar Waxwings. The drive though the refuge was waterfowl focused and we picked up many shorebird species for the trip including, Sandhill Cranes, Killdeer, 100s of Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, thousands of Red-winged blackbirds, common terns, and many brilliant Great Egrets in breeding plumage. The signature bird for the region.

We ate dinner away from the lodge at a local pub and got in one last birding session for the evening at one of Toledo's many local parks, Pearson Metropark. An old formal park, and very Central Park-like in design, it offers a terrific feeder window area and great trails through more mature wet woods. Thrushes rule here too, but we also see Red-headed woodpeckers, two Pileated males squabbling over position on a good drumming tree, Indigo Buntings, and a Common Nighthawk doing its version of the Ruby-throated hummingbird's pendulum



flight display. The Common Night's version also features a boom at the low point of the flight, created by its feathers, but we were a bit too far away to hear it. What a great first day!

**Tues., May 17**

## **Winous Point Marsh Conservancy | Pipe Creek | East Harbor State Park | Magee Marsh**

A Special morning at Winous Point – Today we head east towards Sandusky Bay in search of waterfowl. Naturalist Journeys was granted permission to bird Winous Point Hunting Club and Marsh Conservancy. Now known as the Winous Point Marsh Conservancy, it was established in 1856 as an exclusive member only shooting and hunting club. Today it's North America's oldest continuously operating hunting club and protects thousands of acres of Lake Erie marshes and upland wetlands. It was a brilliantly sunny morning with clear blue skies and the birding started as soon as we stepped out of the vans as flocks of American White Pelicans soared overhead- brilliant white birds lit up against the light blue sky made for great viewing and photographs. Joined by two energetic, but well behaved, hunting dogs, we birded the grounds around the lodge and main campus of the club. Eastern Kingbirds seemed to be everywhere, and we had great looks at Scarlett Tanagers, Tennessee Warblers, Orchard and Baltimore orioles, Blackpoll and Bay-breasted warblers and Indigo Buntings.

Heading out into the marshes, the waterfowl and shorebirds were plentiful. We came across flocks of shorebirds in the hundreds of Black Bellied Plover and Dunlin. Our waterfowl list included Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, American Widgeon, Mallards, and Ruddy Duck. Black Terns were here as well. Hopefully they'll nest in the large tracts of Greater Burreed found here. In all, we had nearly 60 species this morning. From Winous Point we enjoyed lunch in Sandusky then headed out to visit local birding patches around Sandusky Bay. Pipe Creek Wildlife Area was our first stop. Built for waterfowl with diked wetlands, it's the parking lot and woodland walk out to the marshes that the area is famous for with birders. Warblers



concentrate here and we get great looks at Canada and Magnolia warblers low in the vegetation around the parking lot and maintenance buildings. The woodland walk to the marshes produce Lincoln Sparrow, Northern Paulas. Tennessee Warblers, Northern Rough-winged Swallows, Swainson's Thrushes and over 30 yellow warblers, and perhaps our best looks at Great-crested Flycatcher of the trip.

We always try to get to the Magee Marsh Boardwalk in the evening, as it can be some of the best birding with very few people there. So, we had dinner on the road in Port Clinton, and headed to the boardwalk, arriving at 7:30pm. We hit the golden hour as the light was an amazing yellow, making for beautifully lit birds. The Bald Eagles were busy feeding their 3 large nestlings and even breaking off new branches from nearby trees and adding them to the nest. Mourning Warbler was the star of the evening. We had heard them a couple times on the boardwalk, but this was our first and best views. Many warbler species, Bay-breasted being most numerous, were actively feeding in preparation of their evening migration. It was a great experience on the boardwalk.

### **Wed., May 18 Kelley's Island. Glacial Grooves, KI State Park, Jones Preserve**

It was an early morning start so we could make the early ferry over to Kelley's Island. This tiny little island is rich with history, geology and can be an incredible birding experience if the winds are right. Native Americans had a long history on the island and left many inscriptions in the local limestone. The British controlled the island in the War of 1812 and used it to protect the entrance of the Detroit River. Once in American hands the island had several names and was finally named Kelley's Island by the Kelley family that purchased most of the island. Flat water made our ferry crossing very enjoyable. Birding was light during the crossing with just a few Ring-billed and Herring gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, and crows being our only pelagics today.

Once on the island we always go straight to the Glacial Grooves National Historic Site. These are the best (and most accessible) examples of glacial geology in the world. The site is undergoing a major renovation, with several walkways closed, but we were still able to see much of the grooves and try to imagine the mile high



sheet of ice slowly sliding past us. There are good views over an old limestone quarry here and we had tree-to-views of Eastern Kingbirds, Great-crested Flycatchers, and a couple flocks of Cedar Waxwings, which we always keep an eye out for the possibility of a Bohemian mixed in with them. We again see and hear many of the warblers that arrived this week including a very cooperative Black-throated Green Warbler that stayed low in a White Cedar tree for us.

We enjoyed a Lake Erie Perch lunch at the Village Pump and moved on to the Jones Preserve for our afternoon hike. This is a long-standing banding location, and we spend quite a bit of time with banders Tom and Paula Bartlett. Many of us got to release banded birds including Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Northern Waterthrushes, Swainson's Thrushes, Mourning and Magnolia warblers. An Incredible experience for sure. We then walked the rest of the Jones Preserve out to the Lake Erie shoreline where the storm surges push newly broken off limestone up onto the shore, making of for great fossil hunting. Here we find many brachiopod and coral fossils along the shoreline and scan the lake finding Bald Eagles, DC Cormorants (always scanning for the odd Neotropic). We end our day with dinner at a local restaurant near the lodge and turn in early this evening.

## **Thur., May 19                      Oak Openings with Greg Miller of 'The Big Year'**

What a surprise, Greg Miller joined us for a day of birding at Oak Openings Bioregion. Greg is a local birding celebrity and author of *The Big Year*, which was made into a successful movie featuring Steve Martin and Jack Black (Greg). Oak Openings is about an hour west of the lodge and is a region of forested sand dune habitat from when the water feature Metropark. Our first stop was at the Buehner Nature Center that has another great window on wildlife with a water feature that attracts many birds, especially woodpeckers. We visit a couple areas here including the Girdam Road area where we visit the only breeding location in Ohio for the beautiful Lark Sparrows and walk through the fire managed forests of towering pin oaks that provide perfect habitat for the many Red-headed woodpeckers we see. The open fields in the area provide good areas for soaring hawks and we see several Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, and even another Broad-winged Hawk. Nearby Sager



Road is the most reliable area for Blue-winged warbler, and we chase down several individuals here. The Tornado Alley area produced a pair of active Yellow-breasted Chats, Field Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Indigo Buntings. Greg Miller seemed to have a personal or natural history story about most every species. It was a real treat to have him along with us. His unique identification tips will help us all in the future. We head back to Maumee Bay Lodge early in the afternoon – take a quick break- then meet up for an afternoon walk exploring the extensive Maumee Bay boardwalk and marsh areas along the lake. We were so excited to, almost immediately, spot a beautiful male Golden-winged warbler. The boardwalk here passes through a large Eastern Cottonwood woodland that was alive with birds. Many warblers, tanagers, thrushes, and we see amazing Common Nighthawk behaviors and calls. We are also treated to a family of Eastern Screech Owls, an unusual pair of two red-phased adults and four owlets. It was quite the spectacle watching and photographing the parents bringing food to the chicks that were hopping from branch to branch.

## **Fri., May 20                      Magee Marsh Boardwalk | Howard Marsh | Maumee Bay Pond**

This is our last full day of birding and of course we want to spend as much time as possible at the famous Magee Marsh Boardwalk. We get out early and spend all morning on the boardwalk. We tally 70 species. We had a new wave of migration come in overnight. Many of the warblers we've been enjoying all week have moved on and have been replaced by hundreds of flycatchers and we get 10 species – Eastern Pewee, Yellow-bellied, Acadian, Alder, Willow, Least and Eastern Kingbirds. There are still warblers here as well and we tally 12 species this morning as well, with incredible views of Prothonotary Warblers. After a packed lunch at the Black Swamp Bird Observatory Headquarters, we head to Howard Marsh. Once a 600-acre corn and soybean farm, the Toledo Metroparks partnered with Ohio Division of Wildlife to restore 200 acres of wetlands on this site. It was an incredible success and has been used by Black-necked stilts and Yellow-headed Blackbirds as breeding habitat since completion. We have no trouble locating both here along with Osprey, Bald Eagles, Double-crested Cormorants, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebes, Common Gallinule, Dunlin, Common Terns, and Marsh Wrens. Returning to Maumee Bay State Park, we stop at an inland pond within the park that has a large flock of Caspian Terns in various plumages resting on the shoreline. We return to the Lodge and get ready for a night out



at the Beruit Restarant, a famous Toledo dining location. We review our trip highlights and stories over piping hot pita bread and terrific Lebanese food and wine. We wrap up any last items for departures, and head back to the lodge.

## Sat., May 21 Departures

We have one last breakfast at the Lodge and board our vans for the Cleveland Airports. Everyones flights confirmed with no issues, we say our goodbyes at the departure drop off and hope to see one another on a birding trail sometime and some place in the future.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Dan Donaldson - DD), Juvenile Barred Owl (DD), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Park Birding (DD), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Bald Eagle (DD), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Woods Scenic (Deirdre Herrington - DH), **OWL NEEDS ID (DD)**, Gopher? (DD), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, **NEEDS ID (DD)**, **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Magee Marsh (Courtesy of Magee Marsh), Swan (DD), **NEEDS D (DD)**, Scenic (DH), Yellow Warbler (DH), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Selfie! (DD), Deer (DD), **NEEDS ID (DD)**, Birding along the road (DD), New Friends (DD), **Final 6 birds also need ID**