



Passenger Pigeon

Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

Vol. 39 No. 3

March 2003

March Program

The March program, on Thursday, March 20 at 7:00 pm at the Sharon Woods visitor center, will be “The Birds of Gilmore Ponds”, by Mike Busam. Here’s what Mike has to say about his program: “The presentation will cover the natural history and bird-life of Gilmore Ponds and the upper Mill Creek Valley from 250,000 years BP to twenty-five hours ago—more or less. This digital program is guaranteed to be chock-full of interesting bird-related facts and figures, fairly pain free, and with no more references than necessary to a certain airport, Butler County politics, and avigation agreements. As an added bonus, meeting attendees will also learn about The (Dead) Birds of Ellis Lake. As an added, added bonus, we’ll take a brief look at the Voice of America—one of Butler County’s best birding spots, but seemingly Target(TM)ed for a very cruel fate. This program will be completely free of charge, and no collections will be asked for or accepted.”

Don’t be fooled by Mike’s somewhat tongue-in-cheek description of his program. This will be an entertaining but serious fact-filled presentation that also includes photos of some of the best birds at Gilmore Ponds and VOA, two of our prime habitats and birding locations here in the Cincinnati area. Mike is a well-known member of the Cincinnati Bird Club, who has led many field trips to Gilmore Ponds. He has found and reported many unusual and rare birds for the Cincinnati area at Gilmore Ponds and the Hamilton area, including the recent gems, Bobolink, Sedge Wren and Short-eared Owls (VOA), Saw-whet Owl (Gilmore Ponds) and Long-tailed Duck (Great Miami River, Hamilton).

Mike is a stay-at-home dad and editor of the Gilmore Ponds organization newsletter.

Looking ahead, the April program will be the members slide program, which we had to reschedule after the January program had to be cancelled due to bad weather. Watch for details in next month’s newsletter.

March Field Trip

On Saturday, March 22nd, we’ll visit Summit Lake State Park, in Henry Co. Indiana. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the Park & Ride lot located at I-74 Exit # 7, Rt.128 Cleves/Miamitown

This will be a most of the day trip. Bring your lunch, drinks and a full tank of gas. Spring waterfowl migration should be in full swing and 18+ species of Anatidae should be possible. A variety of loons, grebes, gulls, eagles and other raptors, early spring migrants and late winter visitors should also be found. If time allows we will make a stop or two at Brookville Reservoir on our return home. These are great locations at the right time of year and should make for an exciting trip. For more info contact trip leader Jay Stenger at (513) 522-8147 or (513) 522-4245.

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Four Day Dash to Oklahoma Jan 18-21 2003

contributed by Dave Helm

Our plan was to drive to Oklahoma City during Friday night, but we caught a lucky break with a \$145 round trip fare from Cincinnati on the Delta Weekly Web fares. So we flew out Sat. AM and back on Tuesday evening.

We arrived at Wichita NWR (1 hour SW of OKC) at about 1:00 PM and picked-up the Chestnut-collared Longspur as well as three Smith's Longspurs (which apparently are a good bird for that location). There were approx. 200 Chestnut-collared flying and landing as a flock. It took an hour of hiking around the grassland area to find them. We could get fairly close but the grass was long enough to enable the birds to stay hidden until they would all flush. We picked out the field marks as they landed. The Smith's flew about as well and also stayed together. As an unexpected bonus, Steve flushed a LeConte's Sparrow that perched in the open for several minutes. That was a lifer for one of us. Other sparrows there were Vesper and Savannah. We proceeded to the Prairie dog town past Altus and nailed 50 McCown's Longspurs and one Ferruginous Hawk with flocks of Sandhill Cranes in the distance. The McCown's were easy to approach and they were on the ground in the prairie dog town where the grass is nibbled down knee high to a grasshopper. An outstanding first day! We spent the night in Elk City, dinner in the renovated train depot.

On Sunday, we searched in vain for Lesser Prairie Chickens in Harper County and near Arnett. We did find a large flock of Mountain Bluebirds and one Rough-legged Hawk. They weren't targets, but good birds for Ohio birders. A stop at Washita NWR got us our target Harris's Sparrow, as well as the impressive number of Snow Geese and a couple of Bald Eagles. The day ended with a swing through Ellis

County WMA, still trying for the Lesser Prairie Chicken. We spent the night in Woodward.

Monday morning was basically a repeat of the Lesser Prairie Chicken sites, still to no avail. A local contact who has had chickens on his property did not answer the phone the numerous times we called. We left the Harper County location just before noon and drove to the area of Grainola, Foraker, and the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve north of Ponca City. We searched for Greater Prairie Chickens, but no luck with them either. A highlight was finding a group of about 30 Bald Eagles gathered near a cow carcass. The night was spent in Ponca City.

For our last day we visited Sooner Lake and saw many Smith's Longspurs, with better looks than at Wichita Mountains, although our good weather had played out. We also ran across a Lesser Yellowlegs - a bit surprising. The rest of the day was spent visiting the Oklahoma City Memorial and the National Severe Storm Lab/ Storm Prediction Center in Norman. We added a few trip birds at Thunderbird Lake SP before driving to the airport and heading home. Trip list totaled 78 species and we put 1300 miles on the rental car.

Best Regards,

Steve Bobonick (2 lifers)

Dave Helm (1 lifer)

Bob Ireton (6 lifers)



Ted Ellis, R.I.P.

contributed by Mike Busam

Ted Ellis died on January 22, 2003, of a heart attack at age seventy-four. A dedicated birder, nature photographer, and conservationist, Ted was one of the founding members of the Gilmore Ponds Conservancy, and a member and supporter of a number of local, state, and national conservation organizations, including the Cincinnati chapter of the Audubon Society and the Cincinnati Bird Club. The last time I saw Ted, when I stopped by his home to borrow a slide projector, he told me that he was looking forward to the annual Bird Club “member’s slide night,” and planning on bringing slides to the event.

Ted’s life-long interest in nature and photography began when he was growing up in Bond Hill. As a teenager, he was a sort of aspiring John James Audubon—albeit one with a fascination with small mammals. Ted liked to trap, observe, and photograph field mice and shrews, though a number of his subjects escaped his studies and got loose in his parents’ home.

While in high school Ted worked part time at the old Museum of Natural History in Cincinnati where among his mentors were people such as Ralph Dury Jr., Karl Maslowski, and Woody Goodpaster. Ted loved going on field trips to birding hotspots and bat caves, fossil and mollusk collecting, as well as studying amphibians and small mammals. He worked a summer job at the Museum’s Fort Ancient archaeological dig near Newtown where he spent long hours manning a shovel and wheel barrow. Not quite the romantic notions he had had of unearthing and identifying rare artifacts, but it was useful work and in the grand scheme of things, important to the cause as well as being indicative of the kind of work Ted would later put into local conservation issues.

Ted’s sense of humor and good nature were legendary, and he often made himself the

subject of his own jokes and humorous stories. One story that Ted liked to tell appeared in his biography in the Spring 1995 issue of *Around The Ponds*, the newsletter of the Gilmore Ponds Conservancy: “Ted’s thoughts of being a professional museum curator ended with an ill-fated collecting trip to the Florida Everglades that resulted in a temporary evacuation of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History,” the story goes. “Upon his return to Cincinnati, Ted learned from the irate museum director that live shell fish must be THOROUGHLY cleaned before shipment via the U.S. Postal Service.”

Ted never failed to have a hearty laugh when telling that story. “It simply did not occur to me,” I once heard Ted explain, “that I shouldn’t have mailed the Museum live shell fish!”

Ted was a good friend and always-welcome birding companion to many Cincinnati-area birders and nature enthusiasts. For many people, Ted Ellis was the model of what a birder should be, of how a birder should act—the perfect blend of good companionship, dedication to conservation, and enthusiasm for all of nature, but particularly birds. He was always great company in the field and was an active and outgoing participant in field trips whether as a leader or as a participant. He had a personality that has been variously described as “vivacious,” “modest,” “hilarious,” and “outgoing,” the latter of which is certainly an understatement.

Another local birder and long-time friend of Ted’s remarked that it was “always a joy to see Ted up the trail ahead; I was always eager to catch up to him, to do some birding with him.” Ted Ellis is gone from us now, but he’s still only a little ways up the trail, if you think about it. And one day when we all meet up again, Ted Ellis will no doubt be the finest birding guide we could ever dream of!

Ted’s wife, Judy, asks that those wishing to give memorials in Ted’s name consider the Cincinnati Chapter of the Audubon Society or the Cincinnati Nature Center.

The Century Mark in January in Ohio!

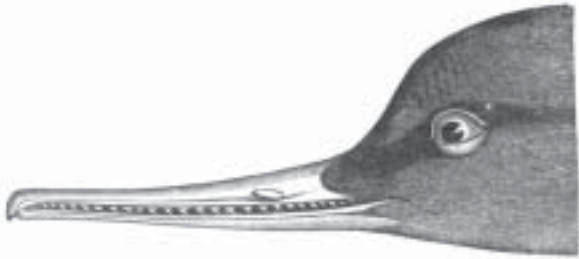
Contributed by Jay G. Lehman

Several years ago Jason Larson of Muskingum College started the craze to identify 100 birds in Ohio in January. While I'm quite crazy when it comes to birding, I have not been bitten by this new craze until this year. It all started at about noon on 1/4/03 with a local hotline call from Ned Keller reporting the Red-necked Grebe (RNGR) found by Bob Foppe and David Whitley at Camp Dennison. I went to see the RNGR and ended the day with 34 species, including 15 species of waterfowl (12 ducks, 2 grebes plus Am. Coot) and two more species found at my home. On Sunday, 1/5/03, the weather reports indicated snow, so I decided to wait a bit before venturing forth. I received an early morning phone call from Dan Sanders and Greg Miller of the Columbus Avid Birders requesting directions to Camp Dennison and the RNGR. Both were trying for the January century mark in Ohio as well as 300+ birds in Ohio for the year. Dan indicated that the roads from Columbus to Chillicothe "weren't too bad" except for a few spots, so I decided to venture out, and at least try to get to Wooster for the male Rufous Hummingbird still over-wintering at a feeder. I started up I 71, which was wet with no snow cover here in the Cincinnati area. However, before I got to Rt. 35, the road got snow covered and dangerous. After maneuvering safely through a 360-degree spin, and observing multiple cars off the road in the ditch, on the north and south-bound lanes, I turned around and headed south. I was thankful for my luck and happy that I had 17 years of experience driving in snow country in upstate New York. Maybe even a little (minimum) good sense! For Sunday, I added a

few species at my home and visited my work site, Health Care Research Center on Mason Montgomery Road, Melvin Quarry along Rt. 3/22 north of Wilmington and surrounding roads, and Caesar Creek SP (CCSP). Highlights included Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier near Melvin and Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Eastern Towhee at CCSP. At the end of the day my January list in Ohio was 47 species. An encouraging list for two days of birding and three weeks to go!

On Monday, 1/6/03, while leaving work late I found a Great Horned Owl (48) silhouetted by the facility lights, hunting from a dead pine tree over the planted prairie at my work-site. Tuesday, 1/7/03, I left work early enough to try for the Short-eared Owls, just found by Mike Busam at VOA, but no luck. However, I did find an Eastern Meadowlark. Wednesday, the weather was good for a drive to Lake Erie, so I used a carry-over day of vacation and headed north early to start the day in the Fairport Harbor area at adjoining "Mew Gull Marina" with the Common Eider mixed in with the Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead and a molting Greater Scaup. At the metropark west of the marina and east of Headland Beach SP, I found an adult Glaucous Gull challenging the Herring Gulls on the jetty parallel to the beach, but a "gang" of Herring Gulls harassed this bird, and it soon disappeared. There were Common Goldeneye present and Common Mergansers along the east side of the light-house jetty at Headland Beach SP and picked up a Black-capped Chickadee nearby. I headed west stopping at Eastlake Power Plant, then 72nd Street and a quick stop at 55th Street, finding nothing new and headed toward Rocky River. The scoters reported the past weekend by

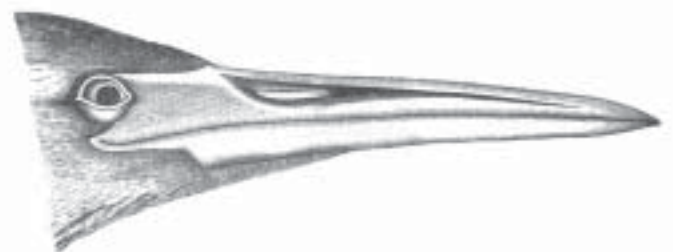
the Avids from Columbus were not at Rocky River, but were visible by scope west of Bradstreet Landing. There was one Black Scoter and one Surf Scoter mixed in with about 11 Common Goldeneye. My last stop of the day was Lorain Harbor for the Long-tailed Duck also reported by the Avids. I met Su Snyder and Jason Larson, another January century-mark seeker there. We looked until the light ran out, but had no luck. The apparent area where the LTDU had been seen was in the marina near the sewage treatment plant, which was mostly ice-covered or filled with packed broken ice. My last new bird for the year for the day was Redhead at Lorain Harbor. I ended the day with 66 species for January, a long way to go for the century mark reported by Dan Sanders and Greg Miller today, Wednesday, 1/8/03. However, this is a respectable list for the first full week of January, starting on Saturday, 1/4, at noon, still missing many common birds present here in SW Ohio, and having only weekends and occasional days off in the search. No insult intended to Dan and Greg....I was envious!



Second Weekend: Saturday, 1/11/03, driving conditions were good, so I drove north to try for the adult male Rufous Hummingbird, still surviving this very cold winter at Ruth Vandersall's hummingbird feeder in Kidron near Wooster. On the way, just after turning east on Rt. 30 from I71, an adult Bald Eagle soared over the road. I stopped and called Mrs. Vandersall to get detailed directions to her house, and at her request picked up a pound of fructose at the local health food store in Wooster to feed her hummer.

It saved her a trip, was a suitable gift for her kindness to many Ohio birders, and I was able to enjoy this tough little guy for about 1.5 hours from her kitchen. She had a heat lamp right by her house wall to heat the feeder and under which he perched on a holly branch. I left her house and headed to E. 72nd Street in Cleveland, where I added Iceland Gull and a Cooper's Hawk on I271 east of the city, ending the day at 70. I tried for the RUHU just in time, because single digit temperatures caused the bird to disappear by the mid-point of the following week. Sunday, 1/12/03, I started at Camp Dennison, adding Brown Creeper, and then headed to East Fork SP, through Batavia, where I added Turkey and Black Vultures at the roost on Rt.222 at the eastern edge of Batavia. From South Beach, there was a Horned Grebe, previously reported by Hank Armstrong, and Winter Wren, Swamp Sparrow, and Field Sparrow at the prairie grass area. At the dam spillway, there was a flock of Eastern Bluebirds and a Yellow-rumped Warbler. At North Beach, I added White-breasted Nuthatch. Just before sunset, I found Pileated Woodpecker east of the Horseman's Parking lot, in my breeding survey territory, and a Barred Owl peering at me from woods opposite the parking lot, just before sunset. At sunset at Camp Dennison, I added Common Grackle and Red-winged Blackbird in a large flock, heading northwest to roost. My January Ohio list was now at 84 with two weeks to go!

Tuesday, 1/14/03 I tried the third time for Short-eared Owl (85) at VOA, and succeeded with two birds, before sunset. This added just a little more energy to the final quest for 100!



Third Weekend: Saturday, 1/18/03, I started at Camp Dennison, looking for the Snow Goose reported by others during the week, but found only Mute Swans. At East Fork SP, South Beach while searching for the Common Loon reported by Hank Armstrong, I found two Double-crested Cormorants. A quick stop at Ginny Fentetti's feeders, yielded two Fox Sparrows, two Red-headed Woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. I headed north to Dayton, and quickly found the two Harlequin Ducks (91) on the Great Miami River. Lucky for me, I met some birders just before I left. After I showed them the exact location of the Harlequin's, they gave me directions to the Ross's Goose they had just seen. I arrived at Marina Drive with just enough light to scan for the Ross's Goose, and found it on my fifth scan (92). On Sunday, 1/19/03, I stopped by Spring Grove Cemetery in hopes of finding Cedar Waxwing or scarce winter finches, but found nothing new, and headed to Miami Whitewater Wetland to try for sparrows. I found the sought White-crowned Sparrows (93), but whiffed on Savannah Sparrow. It was just too cold and windy. Then I tried the Lost Bridge area near Elizabethtown, hoping for Tundra Swans on the river or in the sand quarry lake. No luck again. Finally, I found two Belted Kingfishers (94) east on Rt. 50 by the railroad trestle bridge. On Monday, 1/20/03, President's Day holiday, I headed north to Lake Erie to try for Thayer's and Lesser-black Backed Gull or more unusual winter gulls. I arrived at Avon Lake Power Plant late morning. The conditions were frigid, to say the least, but there were 10's of thousands of gulls on the ice and in the warm outlet flow. I took several hours of braving the cold and wind, a visit or two to my car to warm up, and several addition pairs of eyes from other birders, to add Lesser-black Backed Gull, at least two, and Peregrine Falcon. I just missed a Thayer's Gull, seen at close range by John Kuenzli, originally from Cincinnati, and Thomas Archdeacon. Both, whom I have met before on birding trips in Ohio, are recent graduates from Ohio Northern University. The

peregrine put on quite a display. It tried to catch a goldeneye in mid-air right in front of us off the fishing pier, but did not succeed as the goldeneye plummeted into the water and dove. Somewhat later we had good scope views of the peregrine eating its prey of undetermined species on the ice. There were several Glaucous and Iceland Gulls present as icing on the cake! I ended the day at e. 72nd Street, where there were at least 10 Glaucous Gulls at close range in a 100-foot stretch of ice along the very restricted open water! However, I missed the possible Slaty-backed Gull reported there earlier in the day. At the end of this holiday weekend, my January Ohio list was 96. With a little over one week to go! At this point, if you think that birders are crazy, we aren't as crazy as the fisherman at Avon Lake, who were up to their chest in lake water, fishing for trout in temperatures in the teens and exposed to the wind off the lake! An astonished passer-by took digital photographs!



The Last Surge: On Saturday, 1/25/03 I left early for Killdeer Plains WA to try for Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings, and to meet with the Cincinnati Bird club field trip to look for owls. I got skunked on longspurs and buntings as did the field trip group. The only owl found at was a Barred Owl, after I walked through the pine grove the third time. However, we did find a beautiful dark phase Rough-legged

Hawk (97) at Big Island WA. On Sunday, 1/26/03, in spite of the snowy conditions in Cincinnati, I headed, carefully for Riverside Natural Area in Hamilton, seeking Killdeer. I found one of the Killdeer (98) reported by Mike Busam almost immediately after arrival. Elated with success, I headed for Spring Valley WA where Brown Thrasher and Virginia Rail had been reported previously by Greg Miller and Dan Sanders. I found Virginia Rail (99) in the open spring fed creek at the north-eastern corner of the marsh. Actually, I found three, all in view at the same time! I tried for Brown Thrasher, and heard a likely candidate call note, but thought that it sounded too much like Mockingbird, and never succeeded in getting the bird to show itself. It was snowing, quiet and beautiful at Spring Valley, so I decided to hike a bit to enjoy the solitude. At the very northeast corner of the wildlife area at a spring-fed seep, I found a Grey Catbird (100)! What a fitting bird to celebrate the century mark! There were five days left in January! However, work duties were more pressing, so I waited until some critical work was completed. On Thursday, 1/30/03, I took my last carry-over vacation day to visit The Wilds southeast of Zanesville to try for Golden Eagle. Two had been reported there this winter, and there were Wild turkeys on the way, which I still needed. On the way I decided to stop along the Scioto River in Columbus to try for Wood Duck reported recently by Bob Royse of Columbus. I found the spot along the Scioto River, and while walking quietly up river, I heard a familiar, but unbelievable call note, as some Canada Geese flushed. It was the astonishing but distinctive flight call of a Dunlin. As it flew over my head down river, I could see the size and under-part coloration that eliminated Least, Semipalmated, and Pectoral Sandpiper as well as Common Snipe and Killdeer, and the dusky side of throat and face of a Dunlin (101). Incidentally, as of Sunday, 1/26/03, a Dunlin and a Sanderling were still present at open water at the mouth of Slater Creek on Lake Ontario near Rochester, NY, where as recent as 1/21/03 there were also Purple Sandpiper and Killdeer. So, a winter

Dunlin in Ohio is possible as improbable as it may seem. I found two Wood Ducks (102), male and female down-river. How, lucky can one get?! Elated, I headed for The Wilds, and spent from about 11:30 am until about 3:30 pm looking for Golden Eagle with no success. On the way home, I found the previously reported flock of Wild Turkeys (103) near Chandlersville. At the eastern edge of the village of Carlwick, I found a flock of 40 Brown-headed Cowbirds (104) at a feeder along the road.



After Thoughts: Was it worth it? This is the most fun I have had in January birding in a number of years. It got me outside into the elements, which were certainly invigorating. It's a great way to get exposure to more the light during the many dreary days of January, and to stop the urge to be a couch potato. I did not come close to the new records set by Dan Sanders (132) and Greg Miller (130) for Ohio in January, but I had a great time. See Greg's report at <http://members.isp01.net/hawkowl/JanuaryBigMonth2003.htm>. I missed quite a few common birds. I wonder how many birds one can see in Ohio in January in the Cincinnati area without going to Lake Erie? Well, that will have to wait for another year!

<http://w3.one.net/~keller/cincybirds/goodbird/sighting.htm>

Recent Bird Sightings

Field Trips:
Jeff Hays
521-4477

President:
Paul Wharton
353-3403

Treasurer:
Peggy Gatch
831-3378

Newsletter:
Ned Keller &
Kathy McDonald
941-6497

Programs:
Jay Lehman
527-4701

Bird Club Officers

Kathy McDonald & Ned Keller
Cincinnati Bird Club
7899 Bridgetown Road
Clevs, OH 45002