



Passenger Pigeon

Newsletter of the Cincinnati Bird Club

Vol. 42 No. 2

February 2006

A Second Breeding Bird Atlas for Ohio

It has been over 20 years since the completion of fieldwork on the first breeding bird atlas in Ohio and we are pleased to announce the start of the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II in spring 2006. Like Ohio's first atlas, this new project will offer volunteers an exciting way to learn about the breeding birds of Ohio while generating an immense amount of new information necessary for the effective conservation of birds in the state. By engaging Ohio's citizens in this cooperative effort, the Atlas will foster learning and interaction among bird enthusiasts of all experience levels and will heighten public awareness of birds in Ohio.

The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II is a joint project of The Ohio State University, School of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife. Project Directors for the atlas are Paul Rodewald (OSU) and Scott Hull (Division of Wildlife), and Aaron Boone (OSU) is the Project Coordinator. The Advisory Board for the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II includes John Ritzenthaler (Audubon Ohio), Mark Shieldcastle (Black Swamp Bird Observatory), Ned Keller (Ohio Ornithological Society), Dan Brauning (Pennsylvania Game Commission), and John Castrale (Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife). This large-scale effort is made possible only though the assistance of hundreds of citizen volunteers, and other in-kind contributions from conservation groups, and federal, state, and local governmental agencies in Ohio.

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February Program

Breeding Bird Atlas

Thursday, Feb. 16, 7:00 p.m.

This month's program will spotlight the Second Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas. The story to the left will give you a lot of background on this project. One or more of the project coordinators will be here to fill us in on all the rest of the details. At our meeting, we'll learn how we can participate in this exciting project. You will be able to make a real contribution, regardless of your level of birding skill or the amount of time you have available.

We'll meet at the usual time and place, the third Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m., at the Sharon Woods Visitor Center.

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Breeding Bird Atlas

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Atlas Goals

Ohio contains an impressive amount of avian diversity and a primary goal of any atlas effort is to document this diversity. Using the help of Ohio's extensive birding community over the next five years (2006-2010), the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II will:

- Document the current distribution of breeding birds in Ohio by surveying all 4584 blocks in the state.
- Assess changes in the breeding distributions of birds over the last 20 years.
- Provide new measures of abundance of breeding birds throughout Ohio.
- Identify important areas that support high diversity or species of concern.
- Collect statewide information on the distribution of species that are difficult to survey, such as owls, nightjars, and wetland species.
- Generate new information on the status of Ohio's rare, threatened, and endangered birds.

What's New in the Second Atlas?

Although Ohio's second breeding bird atlas will be similar to our first atlas, there will be a number of exciting additions, due in part to available technologies. For observers that have access to the Internet, our atlas website address is: <http://www.ohiobirds.org/obba2/>

This website will provide you with atlas instructions and materials, and will keep you updated on new developments. Individuals that do not have easy access to the Internet will be updated through periodic newsletters or by contacting their regional coordinator or our offices (see contact information below). We are also working with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology who is developing an exciting web-based application for the atlas. This application will allow volunteers to register and sign up to survey atlas blocks online. In addition, volunteers will be able to enter

their own atlas data and view up-to-the-minute results for breeding birds across the entire state! Although this feature will not likely be available until late spring 2006, examples of Cornell's web application that were produced for the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas are viewable on our website.

Unlike the first atlas, Ohio's second atlas will survey all 4584 atlas blocks in the state, instead of 1 in every 6 blocks (a standard topographic map contains 6 blocks). Surveying all blocks will allow us to more effectively survey rare and uncommon species, including those that are unevenly distributed across the state. This is an enormous task, but we believe the birdwatchers of Ohio will meet this challenge making Ohio's second atlas among the most comprehensive in the nation. It also means that there is plenty of opportunity for you to participate, whether you want to venture into more remote parts of the state, or simply survey in your own backyard!

Your Participation is Needed

The ultimate success of Ohio's next breeding bird atlas depends on the active participation of birders and outdoor enthusiasts from throughout the state. We already have collected names of numerous individuals interested in conducting fieldwork in 2006 and beyond. Every participant can make valuable contributions, and your efforts and dedication as an atlas volunteer will help to make this first field season a big success! Please spread the word about this important endeavor. If you know anyone who might be interested in contributing, please give them our website address or other contact information. We encourage all people with an interest in birds to sign up and participate in this project!

Please sign up now through our website to volunteer for the Atlas. If you do not have Internet access or would like further information, please get in touch with us by telephone or regular mail. ** Note that we are planning to make atlas blocks available for selection in late-

January or early-February, 2006 and that the start of atlasing will begin March 1, 2006. We look forward to working with you over the next five years!!

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Passenger Pigeon by eMail

You can choose to receive your copy of the Passenger Pigeon by eMail instead of getting a paper copy through the regular mail. Getting the newsletter by eMail will save the Bird Club the expense of printing and mailing your copy, and you will receive it several days sooner than the paper copy would arrive. You will need to have the free Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer. If you do not already have it, a free copy can be downloaded from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>.

To sign up for this service, send an eMail to the editor at keller@one.net. You can switch back to a paper copy at any time.

Special Field Trip

The Wilds

Saturday, February 25
Leader – Joe Bens, 353-4229,
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The area around The Wilds, east of Zanesville, has become known as perhaps Ohio's best spot for winter raptors. Besides numerous Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls, Golden Eagles are seen several times each year. A Prairie Falcon was seen regularly here the past two winters, and there have been a couple of reports again this year.

This trip will be special, because we will be able to actually enter The Wilds. The Wilds is devoted to the conservation of grassland species from around the world. Many of us have birded the surrounding former American Electric Power lands, but about ten thousand acres is owned by The Wilds, and is normally open only to paying guided tours. We'll be able to bird much of that area, and we'll also be able to see some of the behind-the-scenes areas (hopefully including a visit to the baby rhinos).

There will be a \$20 charge for this trip, which will be paid to The Wilds. Since they will need to know how many people are coming, you will need to sign up and get your money to Joe in advance.

This will be an all-day trip. We'll meet to carpool at the Park & Ride at the Fields-Ertel exit off I-71 at 7:00 a.m., and won't plan to return until late evening. Pack a lunch, drinks and snacks for the day. We'll stop to eat on the way home.

Birding The Pines (and other evergreens)

contributed by Jay Stenger

My limited botanical knowledge comes almost entirely from my pursuit of birds. One thing I have learned, is that here, in the immediate Cincinnati area, southwestern Ohio, southeastern Indiana and extreme northern Kentucky, our only native conifers are eastern redcedars. But because of people's love of conifers, many species of pines, spruces, firs and other evergreens have been planted throughout the region ever since the first settlers arrived on the scene. From windbreaks and ornamentals in yards and parks, to sizeable pine plantations, conifers are now a part of our local flora. And of course, one doesn't have to travel too far from Cincinnati to find areas of naturally occurring native coniferous forests.

Because pines are not native in our immediate area, it appears the majority of our resident species do not use them as nesting habitat during the summer. Our natural flora is part of the eastern deciduous forest region, and over time, our native birds adapted to this habitat. If you have ever walked through a local pine stand in the month of June, at the peak of the nesting season, you were probably aware of how few birds were using the habitat. That is not to say pines are a sterile habitat. During migration and particularly in winter, tracts of pines and other coniferous trees can be alive with birds. In fact they are one of my favorite places to bird at those times of the year. There are areas within a few hours drive of Cincinnati where pines and other conifers are native. Those mixed forests have a much more interesting and diverse number of nesting species.

Several species of birds are closely associated with conifers, and seldom are seen far from them. It is quite possible that evergreen

plantations, in places where they never existed before, have played a part in the ever changing dynamic of bird populations and distribution. Take for example the Pine Warbler. It is doubtful this species nested in our region prior to the introduction of pines. While it is still considered a rare summer resident, Pine Warblers are now at least locally uncommon to fairly common breeding summer residents in some of our local coniferous woodlands. Pine warblers are among our earliest migrants, the first arriving in early March. By early April many local Pine Warblers are on territory and have begun nesting, well before many other species have even arrived. By the end of May and early June, local Pine Warblers have completed their nesting cycle, just as the spring migration for many species is just winding down. Males, for the most part, quit singing and become silent during this post breeding period. Because of their early nesting, I believe breeding Pine Warblers are easily overlooked. When most birders are looking for breeding birds in June, Pine Warblers are for the most part finished.

Several other species of birds, while not necessarily dependent upon pines, regularly utilize them as roosts. Take owls for example. Barred Owls and Great Horned Owls typically nest in deciduous woodlands. But once their nesting cycle is over, they commonly roost in dense pine groves, especially in the winter. Walking quietly through a pine stand at the right season often turns up one of these species. Two rare species of owls are also partial to roosting in pine stands, the Long-eared Owl and the diminutive Northern Saw-whet Owl, although the latter is just as partial to the native red cedar and dense vine tangles. Because Long-eared Owls are adapted to hunting over large grasslands (similar to the closely related Short-eared Owl, who usually roosts on the ground but will also occasionally roost in pines), dense pine groves adjacent to those areas are likely spots to look for them.

Cooper's Hawk is another species that does not rely on the presence of pines.

Nonetheless I have seen many Cooper's Hawk nests located in pine groves over the years. The closely related and smaller Sharp-shinned Hawk is a rare nester in our area, but both local nests I have seen were also located in pine stands.

Winter in the evergreen groves seems to bring the most excitement for the birder. A number of northern species that are dependent on cone crops for food occasionally "erupt" and move south in search of food during years when their local resources fail. A number of other migrants from the north, where coniferous woodlands form a large part of the habitat, also winter in our region. And while many are not necessarily bound to evergreen stands, these species certainly seem to prefer them. Some of the more regularly occurring species from these two groups include Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Purple Finch and Pine Siskin. While very rare and erratic, conifers are where you should also look for Red and White-winged Crossbills. Add some common and widespread winter residents, that are just as much at home in the conifers as they are in deciduous woodlands, woodpeckers and Brown Creeper to name a few, and a grove of evergreens can be a pretty lively place.

Because many migrant warblers and other songbirds reside in the boreal forest of Canada, many species can be found in pine groves or mixed woodlands during migration. On the other hand, these neo-tropical species have adapted to "life on the road" so to speak, and don't rely on coniferous habitats during their passage. Two exceptions, at least in my experience, are the Cape May Warbler and the Pine Warbler. Of course many more Pine Warblers pass through in migration than attempt to breed and even though I have seen both species in deciduous woodlands during migration, the great majority of my sightings of either species have been in conifers, particularly spruces for Cape May Warbler, and red pines for Pine Warbler.

Native evergreens can be found in the Hoosier National Forest in south central Indiana, and along the Allegheny plateau in eastern Ohio and Kentucky. These native mixed forests usually have large tracts of introduced pines as well. Many of these areas can be easily visited in a days round trip of Cincinnati. In these areas of naturally occurring evergreens, there is a much greater diversity of breeding species. A number of warblers and other songbirds, which we normally only see during migration, nest in these areas. Hocking Hills State Park and Red River Gorge are excellent examples. For instance, Black-throated Green Warbler and Red-breasted Nuthatch are two species, which breed in pines at Red River Gorge. Perhaps the most fantastic assemblage of breeding species occurs at Hocking Hills State Park. Eastern hemlocks and spruces abound in the deep cool gorges found here. This microhabitat is similar to the boreal zones of Canada, and because of this, a number of species breed here that rarely breed elsewhere in Ohio. Some of these species are; Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Magnolia, Canada, Blackburnian, and Black-throated Green Warblers.

So where are the best places to find coniferous woodlands in our region? The answer to that will vary from birder to birder. But first there's the question on how to define our region? I decided to make two lists. The first list represents my picks as the best local spots, local as being defined as the Greater Cincinnati area, or within an hours drive. The second list are my picks for the better, more distant sites, ones that can be easily visited within a days round trip of Cincinnati. Of course everyone has his or her favorite spots, and I expect much controversy on the subject, but I'm willing to take the heat. I have given significant thought to the question and weighed the pros and cons of each site. Distance, acreage, accessibility, aesthetics, reliability, consistency and birding records were all considered. Remember, almost any park, cemetery or woodland, local or otherwise, will have a few evergreens, but I have only included locations that

have considerable coniferous plantings and woodlands. Space does not allow me to give directions to these locations, but information on all of these sites can easily be found on the Internet by doing a simple Google search. These are my choices.

Thanks to Frank Renfrow, for sharing some thoughts for this article.

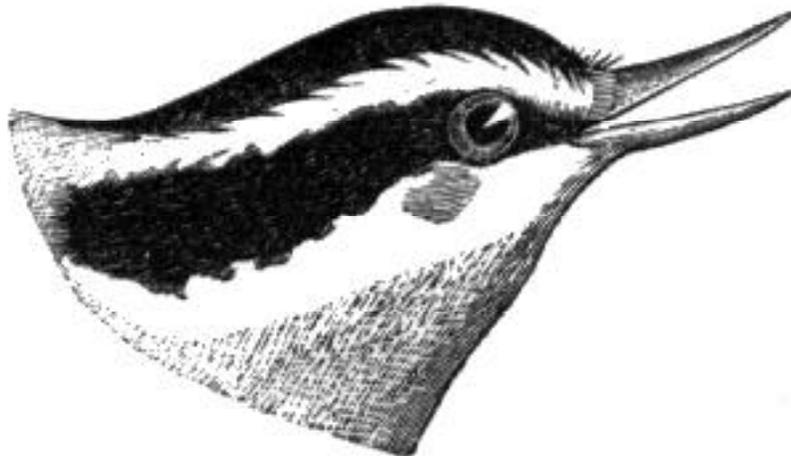
Top 15 Local Sites

- 1) Winton Woods, Hamilton Co. Oh
- 2) Mitchell Memorial Forest, Hamilton Co. OH
- 3) Hueston Woods State Park, Butler & Preble Co. OH
- 4) Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, OH
- 5) Mt. Airy Forest, Cincinnati, OH
- 6) Bachelor Woods @ Miami U., Oxford, Butler Co. OH
- 7) Cincinnati Nature Center, Clermont Co. OH
- 8) Rowe Arboretum, Indian Hill, OH
- 9) Evergreen Cemetery, Southgate, KY
- 10) Germantown Metro Park, Montgomery Co. OH

- 11) Whitewater Memorial SP, Union Co. IN
- 12) Muscatatuck NWR, Jackson & Jennings Co. IN
- 13) Fernald, Hamilton Co. OH (limited public access)
- 14) Fallsville WA, South Unit, Highland Co. OH
- 15) Sycamore State Park, Montgomery Co. OH

Top 10 Distant Sites

- 1) Yellowwood State Forest, Brown Co. IN
- 2) Hocking Hills State Park, Hocking Co. OH
- 3) Shawnee State Forest, Adams & Scioto Co. OH
- 4) Killdeer Plains WA, Wyandot Co. OH
- 5) Clark State Forest, Clark Co. IN
- 6) Red River Gorge, Powell Co. KY
- 7) Tar Hollow SP & SF, Ross & Hocking Co. OH
- 8) Jackson-Washington SF, Jackson Co. IN
- 9) Brown County SP, Brown Co. IN
- 10) Tranquility WA, Adams Co. OH



Local Field Trips

Owling & Woodcock at Miami Whitewater Forest & environs

Saturday, February 11, 2006

Rain Date: Sunday, February 12, 2006

Leader: Paul Wharton, 353-3403,
pwharton@fuse.net

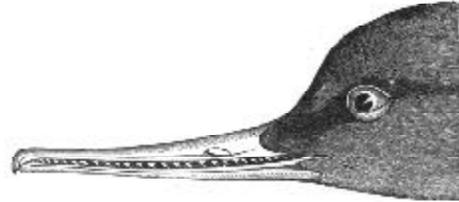
Time: 5:00 P.M.

Meeting Place: Call Paul to register for this trip and to find out where we will meet.

Come out and join Paul for what should be a fun and out of the ordinary night field trip. Paul is confident that we will find displaying American Woodcocks and several owls of at least three species. The plan is to be somewhere in the wetlands before dusk, catch the waterfowl flight as they return to the marsh for the night, and stay until dark and watch and hear woodcock as they go through their spring courtship ritual. Woodcock should be back in decent numbers by that date and hopefully we would find several. Paul has not found Short-eared Owls in the wetlands the couple of times he has looked this winter, but they are always a possibility. After checking the wetlands for owls, we will move on to several sites in and around Miami Whitewater in a determined effort to call in Eastern Screech-Owls, Barred Owls and Great Horned Owls. The use of tapes should increase our chances. There will be an almost full moon, so our chances of seeing the owls are good, and Paul will have a powerful flashlight just in case.

If you have never done any owling before, or for that matter, even if you have, you won't want to miss this trip. There is nothing quite like it. Owling is not so good in the rain however, so we have set up a rainout date for the following night, Sunday the 12th. If your not sure if it's been rained out, call Paul. We expect a lot of interest in this trip and we are not yet sure where we will enter the wetlands, so we ask that you contact Paul to register for this trip. We should be finished around 9:00 P.M. It will probably be cold and the trails in the wetland are usually

muddy, so be advised, wear waterproof footwear and dress warm. We won't play tapes too long in any one spot, and we're sure we won't harm any birds.



Caesars Creek State Park

Sunday, March 5, 2006

Leader: Jay Lehman, 527-4701 (H), 622-2399 (W), lehman.jg@pg.com

Meeting Time and Location: We will meet at 8:30 A.M. in the beach parking lot at Caesars Creek State Park

March means waterfowl migration, and they will be the focus of this trip. Gulls, grebes, maybe an early loon and other water birds should also be present. But Jay will also spend some time in the fields and wooded areas looking for hawks, winter residents and early migrants. Jay will also visit the Visitor Center feeders, which usually produce Purple Finches, and this winter an out of season Dickcissel has been regular there. At least a short visit to nearby Spring Valley WA and the Roxanna gravel pits will also be undertaken in what should be a productive day of birding. Be sure to bring a lunch and drinks, as this trip will go into the afternoon. Caesars Creek has a great record for producing rare birds and their recent Christmas Bird Count recorded around 87 species. It's a fantastic birding area and Jay knows his way around.

Directions: From the intersection of I-275 & I-71, go north on I-71 for about 28 miles. Take exit # 45, Rt. 73. Turn left onto Rt. 73 and go west about 5 miles. After you cross the bridge over Caesars Creek Lake, turn right at the State Park entrance. Follow the park signs to the swimming beach and our meeting spot in the parking lot.

<http://cincinnatibirds.com/goodbird/sighting.php>

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