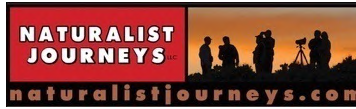
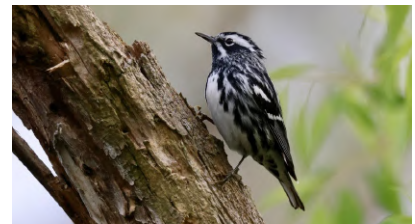


Ohio: The Biggest Week in Birding | May 3-10, 2024 | Trip Report | by Dan Donaldson



Guide(s) Dan Donaldson, Pat Lueders, Sarah Preston and participants Dana, Rich, Steve, Vince, Audrey, Mike, Maureen, Anne, Frank, and Andy.



Fri. May 3 Arrival Day | Rocky River Park, Wendy Park-Cleveland.

It's arrival day and participants arrived either directly by car to Cleveland or arrived at Cleveland Airport. Regardless of mode, by 3:00 we were all in Cleveland, settled into our hotel rooms, refreshed, and ready for some late afternoon birding. We headed directly to nearby Rocky River Reservation, one of our many beautiful Cleveland Metroparks. This park is very famous in the paleontology world for its best-in-class fossils of Donkleosteous, a large shark-like fish that roamed seas that covered Ohio 300 million years ago. After a quick walk through of the nature center, we ventured out on our walk. First stopping the Rocky River overlook deck that gave us our first views of the shale beds in the Rock River gorge. We started picking up birds right away.



Rough-winged swallows are nesting along the walls of the gorge providing great views and photos. Solitary Sandpipers worked the water's edge for insects and bathed in the shallows.

We then hiked a loop trail that took us up a 200 step staircase to ancient Native American earthworks and great views of the Rocky River Gorge. Here we were able to do some treetop birding picking up 44 species of Ohio woodland species including Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Baltimore Orioles, Yellow-throated Vireos, House and Carolina wrens, and great views and photos of Swainson's Thrush.

Nest we headed to downtown Cleveland's Wendy Park, a small local park at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. Walking along the river and lakeshore we emphasized the water birds we might not see on the rest of our trip. Here the river is bulkheaded on both sides for shipping purposes. It's still very birdy though Double-crested Cormorants, Caspian Terns, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Lesser Scaup. White-crowned Sparrows were here in good numbers, and we were delighted to have 4 Lincolns Sparrows feeding along the trail on our way back from the Lake. We happened upon a small feeding flock of warblers in a small woodlot by the parking lot. After viewing Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Palm, and plenty of Yellow warblers, we had to peel the clients away from this spot and make our way to dinner at the nearby Harp Irish Pub.

We returned to the hotel after a great meal. In the parking lot we heard displaying American Woodcocks in the small lot next to the hotel. We stood at the fields edge and listened to a couple display flights. We then headed into the hotel, did our bird list for our first day of birding and headed off to our rooms.

Sat., May 4

A Day in Cuyahoga Valley National Park

We spent our first full day in Ohio exploring the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. First stop was the Station Road Bridge area. Our target birds here were Cerulean and Yellow-throated warblers. We managed good treetop looks of the Yellow-throated and dipped on the Ceruleans. We walked 3 miles here, through the floodplain wetland and nearby all-purpose towpath trail along the river. We picked up 50 species here including wonderful looks at Red-headed woodpeckers, Spotted Sandpipers, Orchard and Baltimore orioles, our first Pileated Woodpecker, Barn, Tree, and Northern Rough-winged swallows, and some quality time with a Blue-winged Warbler.



Nest we drove down the road to the Great Blue Heron Rookery. This rookery has been active for over 20 years. Here we saw everything from new nests being built to chicks that were half the size of the adults. With nearly 50 nests here, there was a lot of activity and sounds; squawking chicks, feeding, and adults coming and going from the rookery the entire time. Satisfied with our views and photographs, we headed off to lunch in the historic Village of Peninsula at the Winking Lizard Taver.

After lunch and a quick visit to Cuyahoga Valley Park Store, we headed back to through the valley to the Beaver Marsh Boardwalk area. This is also along the same towpath trail. We walk the busy towpath past a remnant canal lock to arrive at the beaver marsh boardwalk section of the trail. We were immediately greeted by a very cooperative Sora Rail and Virginia Rail (they often associate with each other). Several times these two beauties walked within feet of us as they scrambled around in the marsh reeds. Other birds seen on that walk were Eastern Kingbirds, Wood Ducks, calling Wood thrushes, and great looks at Common Yellowthroats.

This made of a full day of birding and we returned to our hotel and freshened up for our dinner at La Dolce Vida in Cleveland's Little Italy neighborhood. Best restaurant of the trip for sure.

Sun., May 5 Cleveland Downtown Birding | Sandy Ridge Metropark | Maumee Bay State Park

It's our transfer day. After breakfast are vans were packed and off we went for some morning birding. We began the day by birding some downtown Cleveland local birding patches. First stop- Erie Street Cemetery-one of Cleveland's first cemeteries and it's a small green oasis among the office buildings downtown. Once here, these birds are pretty much stuck here for the day and they spend it actively feeding in the trees and shrubbery. The cemetery is surrounded by a tall stone wall that offers cover and hides the hustle and bustle of the nearby streets. We located 5 Veeries here and had amazing closeup looks at them with posing on head stones or picking insects off the stone walls. Wood Thrushes were here as well and we had views of both species at the same time in our binoculars. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers we active here as well. It was a treat to pickup our first Eastern Wood-Pewee here, along with Orange-crowned, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Northern Parula, Palms, Yellow-rumped warbler, and Oven Bird (which feels like it should be mentioned with the thrushes instead of warblers)



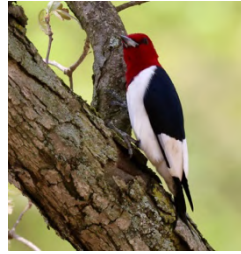
Next stop was back at Wendy Park. This time in the morning, and what a morning it was. It's always nice to be at a birding spot on "The Day", and this was one of them. We could have spent the whole day in this small 3 acre woodlot and nearby park. We had 48 very viewable species here, including, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Eastern Kingbird, Blue-headed, Warbling and Red-eyed vireos, House and Winter Wrens, several Hermit and Wood thrushes, White-crowned, White-throated sparrows, and Black and White, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstarts, Cape May, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Wilsons, Yellow-rumped, Yellow and Palm Warblers – WOW!! It was hard to walk away from this spot, but we had to get on the road and head to western Ohio and the famous Magee Marsh Boardwalk.

Mon., May 6 Forsythe NWR | Avalon Seawatch

Last night, we settled into our rooms at the Maumee Bay State Park Lodge, had dinner and now breakfast. This morning we heading straight to the Magee Marsh Boardwalk. Arriving at the parking area we knew right away it was going to be a busy day, with both birds and people. It was very busy and the birding was wonderful right from the parking lot. We pulled everybody together for our group photo at the entrance and headed in. Yes the boardwalk is filled with people, but everyone in our group remarked about how it was surprisingly "pleasantly busy". It's a great experience to be with so many people that are so interested in birds, sharing, and just as happy to be there as we were. Along the boardwalk loop we had even better looks at many of the warblers we've seen so far, but added great views of Prothonotary, Blackburnian, and Black-throated Green warblers this morning, along with a very cooperative Screech Owl.

Lunch was back at the Maumee Lodge, and in the afternoon we headed to Howard Marsh, a recently restored wetland in what was previously a 400 acre cornfield. This new wetland complex attracts an amazing amount of birds and we'll stop here often just to check for new species. Species on our stop today include Wild Turkey, Pied-billed Grebe, nesting, Black-necked Stilts, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Common Gallinule, Coopers Hawk, American Kestrel, Osprey, and many Marsh Wrens- mostly heard in the reedbeds.

A capped off our birding day with a stop at nearby Metzger's Marsh and added to our species seen with Sandhill Cranes, Trumpeter Swans, Caspian, Forster's, and Common Terns. The small woodlot at the end of the road produced several of the same warblers seen at Magee. Back to the Lodge for a bit of rest and dinner.



Tues., May 7 Maumee Bay State Park, Pearson Metropark.

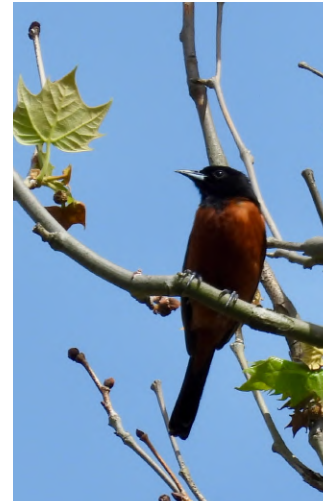
This morning we started our birding off with a celebrity bird walk with Tom Stephenson, author of *The Warbler Guide*. We met on the ground of the lodge and walked the open fields and forest edges around the park. The field habitats were the most productive with great views of Indigo Buntings, an active pair of Orchard Orioles, Field Sparrows on territory and Brown Thrashers, with their ratchetting calls flying from shrub to shrub. Northern Waterthrushes claimed the wetter shrublands, if only for a couple days, before they continued their migration northward. The forest edge was active and we had our best looks at Eastern Wood Pewees of the trip here. Lunch was at the infamous Blackberry Corners, a tavern that has a close connection to birders going back over 30 years. Famous for their pies, the term Lifer Pie was born here.

In the afternoon we visited nearby Pearson Metropark, one of Toledo's first metroparks that preserved some of the last remaining old growth forest from the Great Black Swamp that once covered the entire area. Here there are towering trees growing in wet woods. Perfect for birds and insects. Here our quick walk produced our first Ruby-throated Hummingbirds of the trip, our closest encounter with Black-throated Blue warbler, Black-throated Green warbler and a pair of Scarlett Tanagers. We had the afternoon off to explore the exhibits in the lodge or walk the grounds of the park. The group was introduced to Sarah Preston another local Ohio guide that spelled Dan as he had to return to Cleveland to greet the second Ohio Big Week Trip. Dinner was at the Oregon Inn, one of the finest dining spots in the area.

Wed., May 8 Magee Marsh Boardwalk, Oak Openings Region

After breakfast we started our day at Magee Marsh boardwalk. A good variety of warblers were still present so we focused on getting better looks and photos of the species we've already seen. We picked up a new species this morning with an early arriving Blackpoll Warbler. The Screech Owl pair were in their roosting trees again, amazing close to the boardwalk and all the action. Amazing that they roost all day here, seemingly oblivious to the scads of people nearby. We had our best observations of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks today along with a nesting pair of Prothonotary Warblers that put on a show all morning. We decided to go for a quick walk along the beach and estuary trail and were greeted by a nice flock of American White Pelicans flying overhead. We heard flying Sandhill Cranes as well, but stayed over the marsh and trees blocked our views.

Lunch was at Tony Packo's, a famous and quirky local restaurant, famous for its buns. I'll leave it at that.



Afterwards, drove to the Oak Openings Region, a very interesting habitat made up of oak savannahs, sand dunes, and wetlands, providing habitat for birds that often can't be found elsewhere in Ohio. Red-headed Woodpeckers are the dominant species of woodpecker here, and we saw many. The sand dunes are host to Ohio's only breeding location of the beautiful Lark Sparrow, of which we had great views. Driving the roads we stopped at several locations and had great scope views of Grasshopper Sparrows, Blue Grosbeak, Field Sparrows, Blue-winged Warblers and Orchard Orioles. Yellow-breasted Chats were heard calling in the Tornado Alley area, but we were unable to locate them. A quick stop at Westwinds Metropark to scan the fields for Henslow's Sparrows were successful. We were able to hear their unique song and had quick pop-up views of them in the tall grasses. Dinner was at Luckie's Barn & Grill for some great BBQ.

Thurs., May 9 Metzger and Howard Marsh | Ottawa NWR

It was cooler with on and off rains today. We opted for some roadside birding along the marshes in the area. Howard Marsh was the first stop and we again watched the nesting Black-necked Stilts for a while and picked up Blue-winged Teal for the trip and a nice flock of Dunlin. Driving on to Metzger Marsh, we saw a bunch of previously seen species including, Tundra Swans and Common Gallinules. Herring Gulls we're utilizing the muskrat huts for spots to rest for the day. Common Terns we still active in the area as they nest nearby on platforms made of old pontoon boats and anchored out in the marshes.

Next we drove the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge's driving tour that took us out on the dikes, through the wetland cells that are managed at different levels to encourage the most wildlife diversity this time of year. We had great looks at Lesser Yellowlegs, and a pair distant Dowitchers that we were uncomfortable calling between Large and Short-billed. Scanning the groups of Trumpeter Swans we located a pair of Tundra Swans. We were able to make great identification comparisons between Tundra and Trumpeter since they were feeding together. Least Sandpipers were a nice addition to our trip list and we had a small flock that was easily identifiable as we could see their yellowish legs. That wrapped up our birding today. We made our way back to the lodge for a last chance visit with the festival activities and to get ready for our last dinner together at The Beirut restaurant. A must do restaurant when visiting the Toledo area. Our last checklist session included our favorite birds and our favorite birding location of the trip. Blackburnian Warbler was our official bird of the trip and favorite location was the Magee Marsh Boardwalk, of course, with honorable mention for Wendy Park in Cleveland.

Fri., May 10

Departures

It's departure day and we had to head back to the Cleveland airport right after breakfast to make our early afternoon flights. Departure days are always a bit melancholy. We're tired but we reflect on our week of activities and the new friends we've made. There are already conversations about birding together in the future and trips we'll be taking next. At the airport we said our last goodbyes, made sure we had good contact information for each other and made our way to the flight counters. Hope to see you all on the birding trail again.

Photos: Group (Pat Lueders - PL), Magnolia Warbler (Dan Donaldson - DD), Chestnut Sided Warbler (DD), Black-and-white Warbler (DD), Eastern Screech-Owl (DD), Bald Eagle (Dana Thomas - DT), Blackburnian Warbler (DD), Group Birding (PL), Eastern Red Squirrel (DD), Eastern Bluebird (DD), Female Wood Duck (DD), Bull Frog (DD), American Goldfinch (DT), Black-throated Green Warbler (DD), Chestnut-sided Warbler (DT), Sandhill Cranes (DT), Black-throated Blue Warbler (DD), Scarlet Tanager (DT), Prothonotary Warbler (DD), Red-headed Woodpecker (DD), Tundra Swan (DT), American White Pelicans (DD), Orchard Oriole (PL)