

WHAT'S IN A NAME AND LET'S PUT CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

MAGEE MARSH BIRD TRAIL

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Over the past 10 years the sport of birding has been greatly on the increase. By and large this hobby is one of moderate expense and has required little or no giving for the taking. By that I mean to enjoy the sport a player has had no requirement to support his or her subject matter. Ohioans and indeed midwesterners have been blessed with a series of conditions that have created one of the best locations to observe migrating birds in North America. The combination of Lake Erie, a remnant beach ridge, and a concerned owner have preserved for all a fantastic observation point for nature. This place in question is the Magee Marsh Bird Trail. This 7 acre bird mecca nestled in between the marshes of Magee and Ottawa NWR and the swimming beach and parking lots making up Crane Creek State Park has at times in May taken on the look of rush hour of any metropolis. Maybe this isn't a good analogy: those in rush hour traffic are paying for highway upkeep, the birders traveling the trail can't say the same. Here comes what is in a name and where does the credit belong.

In the early 1950's Magee Marsh was acquired by the Ohio Division of Wildlife through the use of monies from the federal Pittman-Robertson Act. This act placed an excise tax on firearms and ammunition and earmarked it for return to the states for wildlife management purposes. The highly valuable habitat preferred by migrating passerines not only included the present trail but also the outer ridge and swampy area in between. In the mid 1950's the Ohio Division of Parks and Recreation established Crane Creek State Park Beach on the outer ridge and turned the swampy region between into parking lots to handle the great numbers of swimmers and picnickers attracted to the beach. In adhering to the philosophy of the division the property was converted to human recreation sacrificing the wildlife values along the way. This is not an exception but has been and is being repeated all over the state. Parks are for people as dictated by the will of the people. It is in the process of happening in the 80's at Maumee Bay State Park right now. It is not wrong for it is what the tax paying public wants. However, wildlife and its habitat are the direct losers. While the Ohio Division of Parks and Recreation was converting the outer ridge into intensive human use facilities the Ohio Division of Wildlife continued to manage the inner ridge along with the rest of Magee Marsh. A trail was developed to allow for the intrusion of humans into the wildlife habitat in the small confined inner ridge. Though the immense popularity of the location a couple of decades later was not foreseen it was felt that there was room for minor human use in this wildlife habitat. This illustrates a basic philosophy difference between the divisions of Wildlife and Parks. Wildlife lands are developed for wildlife uses and when feasible and compatible human use is incorporated into the plan. Park's lands are developed for human use with wildlife entering where feasible.

While the Magee Trail's popularity has grown over the years and the maintenance cost increased as well, a smaller and smaller proportion of Ohioans have footed the bill for its existence. The upkeep of the trail has come out of the budget of the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. This budget is made up from hunting and fishing license fees and taxes on firearms and ammunition. No general tax revenues are involved. Not a single dollar of the Crane Creek State Park budget has ever been spent on the trail. In fact, as complaints on use and damage to the trail hit the governor's office in the 80's, the Parks Division in letters to the director made it clear that this was a Division of Wildlife problem as it was not a part of Crane Creek State Park.

So what is in a name? Superficially maybe very little. Technically a lot. Should birders continue to refer to an area by a name that even the Parks division says doesn't exist and in fact have gone out of their way to destroy all equivalent habitat on their adjacent area so that you may swim and picnic? It's time that birders and their publications give credit where credit is due. It has been the Ohio Division of Wildlife through the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area that has developed and maintained the trail. Without it there would be no trail and no public birding area. With no special funds available the trail has not reached its fullest potential. Due to a lack of personnel for monitoring and a lack of caring by the users the trail is not in the best shape possible. This is now being addressed by the Division of Wildlife. Through funds generated by the Tax Write-off Non-Game Fund plans are now being developed to boardwalk the trail, to make it handicapped accessible, to make it unquestionable where the trail ends and wildlife habitat begins. So give credit where credit is due and support the Ohio Division of Wildlife through the Non-Game Tax Write-off and refer to Ohio's showcase of birding for what it really is--the Magee Marsh Bird Trail.