

*The Ohio*



# CARDINAL<sup>TM</sup>

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Autumn 1999



*The Ohio Cardinal* is a quarterly publication devoted to the study and appreciation of Ohio's birdlife.

*The Ohio Cardinal* exists to provide a permanent and timely record of the abundance and distribution of birds in Ohio; to help document the occurrence of rare species in the state; to provide information on identification of birds; and to provide information on birding areas within Ohio.

*The Ohio Cardinal* invites readers to submit articles on unusual occurrences of birds, bird distribution within the state, birding areas in Ohio, identification tips, and other aspects of ornithology. Bird reports and photographs are welcome from any area of the state. Report forms are not a necessity but will be supplied upon request. Unusual species should be documented, and forms to do so are available upon request from the Editor, Publisher, and Records Committee Secretary.

### Seasonal Report Due Dates

Winter (Dec.-Feb.) - March 25  
Spring (Mar.-May) - June 25  
Summer (Jun.-Jul.) - August 25  
Fall (Aug.-Nov.) - December 25

### Please send all reports to:

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## The Ohio Cardinal

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*On the Cover:* Long-billed Curlew - Holmes Co., 1 October 1999. Photo by Bruce Glick.

## Autumn 1999 Overview

by Bill Whan

The fall season hung around like a pumpkin neglected on the porch, fermenting, then puckering and falling in upon itself, till it had endured long past its prime and its appointed time. Once again the season was unusually warm and dry, bidding to establish a significantly lengthy trend, especially for temperatures. Here in the central part of the state, for example, in no month over the past two years has the average temperature failed to exceed historical averages by at least two—and as much as 11.1—degrees Fahrenheit. This fall, fewer storm systems grounded fewer southbound migrants, allowing more than usual to pass unnoticed, and fewer of the sought-after but generally regular strays (e.g., eared grebe, ibis spp., parasitic jaeger, Sabine's gull, etc.) were driven our way by the weather.

On the other hand, lower Lake Erie levels (September's level was 1.4 feet lower than that of September '98, and 2.3 feet lower than that of September '97) did attract more migrant shorebirds. Record numbers (see the BSBO report in this issue) showed up on undiked portions of the lakeshore, such as near Sheldon Marsh and Conneaut harbor, and reduced flow, due to drought in the interior, further transformed the estuaries of waterways like Crane Creek and the Huron River into spectacular wader habitat. Inland, many areas wet in spring were dry by mid-August, but large bodies of water shrank, with choice spots like Berlin Reservoir inviting numbers of shorebirds that rivaled the throngs at places like Crane Creek.

For passerines, experienced observers reported a rather thin but protracted fall migration. Few fallouts or big counts were noticed, and lower peaks than usual seemed to be balanced by a migration that lasted long enough to set some records and near-records for late occurrences. Encouraging or not—depending upon whether one roots for birds or for trees—were regional outbreaks of spruce budworms, leading to better numbers of the Cape May warblers so scarce in recent years. Banding data in West Virginia confirmed that they, along with fellow budworm-specialists Tennessee and bay-breasted warblers, were indeed more numerous than the most recent ten-year average, though still 30% below the long-term average.

Few of the predicted record tide of waterfowl appeared during the period, seemingly at least in part because unfrozen northern waters induced them to linger, and also because the prairie potholes of mid-continent produced the bulk of this year's increase. Eastern Canada—which produces most of the ducks and geese passing through Ohio—had a correspondingly less productive breeding season. Larid rarities were few, though a pomarine jaeger near Cincinnati was rare enough to suit anyone. Franklin's gulls, even if their numbers fell short of last fall's, made a good showing, and the beleaguered black tern undertook an excellent twelve-day statewide sweep—excellent, that is, by the meager standards of recent years.

The disadvantageous placement, for purposes of fall hawk-watching, of Lake Erie does not excuse the low numbers of raptors reported in the state of late. Compare our paltry numbers of broad-winged hawks with the staggering 501,000 counted on 17 Sept only 30 miles to our north at Lake Erie MP in Michigan. Where do these birds go, if not through Ohio? Reports to Southeast Michigan Raptor Research added up to 665,512 raptors this fall, with record numbers of sharp-shinned, broad-winged, and Swainson's hawks (14), golden eagles (245), and peregrine falcons (93). Much of