

The Ohio



CARDINAL™

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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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On the Cover: California Gull - Caesar Creek State Park, Warren Co., 15 May 2000.
Photo by Bob Royse.

Spring 2000 Overview

by Bill Whan

In ancient Rome, the priestly college of the augurs had the task of taking the auspices (*auspicia*, from *avis spicere*, "the observation of birds"). Standing on an elevated spot and facing south, they forecast the future of civic undertakings by studying birds' flight and vocalizations, interpreting them as omens from the gods. For the rest of us, it is challenging enough to look back and make sense of the past. After all, the complex weather conditions—and the phases of the moon, or stranger omens—that influence bird migrations are easier to recognize after the fact than beforehand. Ask birders how they might tell what birds tomorrow will bring, and you'll get a mixed answer including remembrance, folklore, and magic. Who knows if tomorrow will be an auspicious day? Guessing what the birds will do is too tempting a habit to give up, but our task here is to pay attention to what happened this spring, to interpret as best we can what the birds are telling us.

Looking backward then, temperatures in the 60s and 70s statewide in late February helped usher in an exceptionally warm spring. In Cleveland, April featured only a single day of frost—0° F on the 27th—after mid-month, and just four days with measurable snow, each 0.4 inches or less. Cincinnati had it even easier, with a 0.2-inch last snow on 4 April and a final frost only five days later. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration called the first four months of 2000 the warmest in 106 years of record-keeping for the US. Didn't they say that last year? Ohio orchardists estimated a harvest two weeks ahead of schedule, the earliest in decades, and nature delivered on the promise, luckily enough. Animals are generally better prognosticators than plants; Ohio birds don't start nests early just because of a few warm days in February. As for precipitation, the period started quite dry in March, but later became considerably wetter than normal, trending into the next period, though deeper effects of long-term drought persisted in many areas of the state.

Whatever the effects of warm weather in recent years, this migration bucked recent trends by lasting longer and proceeding at a more measured—some veterans even called it a dull—pace. Overflights were quite scarce, and even though some species stretched the early limits of their customary schedules, a few others seemed to take their time. All in all, 286 species were reported, a significant fifteen of them on the Review List, with documentation for all of the latter sent, or at least promised, to the Ohio Bird Records Committee.

Our scarcer colony-nesting waders—snowy and cattle egrets, little blue herons—seemed harder to find. Waterfowl numbers, at least in most of the usual spots, seemed depressed, and even where in good numbers they did not linger long. Among raptors, ospreys seemed up in numbers, and the winter's many rough-legged hawks, along with its unprecedented bonanza of merlins and golden eagles, continued into spring. Rails in general seemed down, with some traditional spots eerily silent. Shorebird numbers probably fell short of last spring's; even at spots so productive during last fall, like the Crane Creek estuary and Sheldon Marsh next to the old Cedar Point causeway, a lot of apparently prime habitat went unvisited. No one could justifiably complain about shorebird variety, however, with species like black-necked stilt, ruff, piping plover, Hudsonian godwit, and long-billed dowitcher reported; a spring with 32 species comes along very seldom.