A. Brinkman, Lori Brumbaugh, Jenny Brumfield, Nancy Brundage, Sandy Buckles, Byron Burlett, Don Burton, Mike Busam, Neill Cade, David Chaffin, Todd Chapman, Ann Chasar, Dwight Chasar, Delores Cole, Bob Conlon, Clay Corbin, Rick Counts, Brad Courson, Bill Creasey, Rich Cressman, Brad Cullen, Mable Dailey, Leo Deininger, David Dister, Doug Dunakin, Micki Dunakin, Eric Durbin, Curt Dusthimer, Bob Evans, Vic Fazio, Duane Ferris, Dave Fidler, Bob Finkelstein, Doug Fisher, Gretchen Fluke, Bob Foppe, Howard Fradkin, Frank Frick, Jim Fry, Charles Gambill, John Games, Larry Gara, Ted Gilliland, Dolores Glauser, Kent Glauser, Bruce Glick, Rita Goeke, Adam Goloda, Laura Gooch, Peter Gottschling, Jeff Grabmeier, Darlena Graham, Jeff Greene, Brad Hammond, Joe Hammond, Betty Hardesty, Rob Harlan, Stephen Harvey, Jeff Hays, Bill Heck, Dave Hedeen, John Herman, Hank Hiris, Sally Hiris, Carl Hoagstrom, Dave Hochadel, Judy Hochadel, Tim Hochstetler, Dick Hoffman, Jean Hoffman, Chuck Holliday, Craig Holt, Janet Holzworth, Phil Honsey, Dave Horn, Linda Houshower, Judy Howard, William Hull, Cece Johnston, Ned Keller, Cal Keppler, Don Kinsman, Dennis Kline, Jonathan Kline, Vernon Kline, Gerry Klug, Kurt Knebusch, Ron Kolde, Tim Kolde, Steve Landes, Jason Larson, Jay Lehman, Jim Lesser, Greg Links, Doreene Linzell, Paula Lozano, Barbara Lund, Susan MacGinnis, Ben Martineau, Charlotte Mathena, Audrey Mayer, Jim McCormac, Brian McGuire, Joe McMahon, Paul McSweeny, Brian Menker, Kevin Metcalf, Greg Miller, Jeffrey Miller, Jolan Miller, Lee Miller, Lucy Miller, Roy Miller, Steve Miller, Mary Misplon, Ben Morrison, Donald Morse, Heather Nagy, Art Osborn, Doug Overacker, Ann Paschall, Bayard Paschall, Larry Peavler, Steve Pelikan, Bill Perrine, Haans Petruschke, Lester Peyton, Ed Pierce, John Pogacnik, Len Powlick, Nancy Powlick, Dennis Profant, John Rakestraw, Pam Raver, Frank Renfrow, Glenn Redmer, Grant Rettig, Steve Reeves, Steve Richards, Larry Richardson, Craig Rieker, Dave Riepenhoff, Mary Ann Romito, Tom Romito, Larry Rosche, Paul Rosenberry, Sue Ross, Ed Roush, Bob Royse, Jon Ruedisueli, David Russell, Dave St. John, Charlie Sanders, Dan Sanders, John Sawvel, Dan Scheffel, Paul Schiff, Ed Schlabach, Robert Schlabach, Wilma Seiler, Ron Sempier, Mark Shieldcastle, Troy Shively, Tona Sica, Darlene Sillick, Tom Simmons, Carol Skinner, Mark Skinner, Steve Smith, Su Snyder, Barb Sponseller, Terry Sponseller, Pat Soehnlen, Bill Stanley, Gene Stauffer, Jay Stenger, Dave Styer, Mark Swelstadt, Bill Thompson, Gary Thompson, Rob Thorn, Tim Tofford, Elliot Tramer, Andy Troyer, Mervin Troyer, Tom Uhlman, Jordan Vince, Sandy Wagner, Mary Warren, Melvin Weaver, Bill Whan, Pete Whan, Paul Wharton, Ben Winger, Emery Yoder, Leroy Yoder, Morris Yoder, Perry Yoder, Sheryl Young, Sean Zadar, Marian Zehnder, Julie Zickefoose, Phil Zito, Mark Zloba, Mark Zuilhof, Brian Zweibel. *The Ohio Cardinal* also received invaluable assistance and information from the editors of *The Bobolink* and *The Cleveland Bird Calendar*, the Northwest Ohio Rare Bird Alert, and online resources managed by Victor Fazio III.

Enjoying a nap, this willet was captured on film on 15 May 2000 at Caesar Creek State Park, Warren Co. Apparently, it was oblivious to the lurid show that day. Photo by Tom Uhlman.

Further Afield
by Rob Harlan

When it's their time to go, most folks would probably prefer to push up daisies in a peaceful, manicured Woodlawn, Green Lawn, or Spring Grove. Some of the more adventurous among us might request their ashes be spread over a lofty crag, an ancient shrine of desert solitude, or perhaps over a tranquil turquoise sea. But when it's my turn to go, it would suit me just fine if they shoved me under the boardwalk at the Magee Marsh Bird Trail.

I'm crazy about the place, and have been for years. It's the crown jewel of Ohio birding, and whether it's known as Magee Marsh, Crane Creek, or simply The Bird Trail, the name is synonymous with Midwestern spring birding at its most delicious. I offer no apologies to other prime Ohio birding sites—I've tried them all, and I do like them. Each has its own uniquely outstanding qualities and rarities bragging rights. But they simply can't stack up against the Bird Trail when it comes to consistent variety and numbers. And if you've been to the Trail on a good day, then I'm preaching to the choir.

I'm probably safe in assuming that most everyone reading this column has visited the Trail at least once or twice, or maybe once a year for many years, or even dozens and dozens of times throughout the years. I'm thankful to say I fall into the last category. Shame on you if you've never birded the Trail; if you fall into *this* category, please take a moment right now to remove five birds (of your choice) from your life list. You may have them back once you've made your first visit. Thank you for your cooperation.

So what makes the Trail so special? There are any number of reasons of course, but some of the most frequently-cited might be: lots of birds, lots of colorful birds, lots of colorful singing birds, and lots of *good* colorful singing birds, all in a delightful lakefront environment and shared with the company of old birding friends. But even more intriguing to me is the fact that we can have all of the above in a comfortable framework of predictability, based on the collective knowledge gained in a century of spring fieldwork. In our instinctive efforts to make order out of seeming chaos, we have come to know what to expect and when, and in what numbers, all with a reasonable degree of accuracy. But each spring always throws in enough wildcards to keep us off balance, to force us constantly to redefine the dimensions of our predictable framework. You can be sure that just as soon as we think we have all the answers, nature will change the questions. But that makes it fun.

This past spring was really no different from most other springs at the Bird Trail. Some individual birds were early, most were on time, and some were late. Some species were in low numbers, most were in expected numbers, and some were more plentiful than usual. And rarities were found. All of which serves to reinforce our framework of predictability. But when boiled down in this manner, it makes spring 2000 seem dry and lifeless, which it most assuredly was not. And so I offer some of my personal reflections regarding the May 2000 Bird Trail season. Let's start on…

May 4—Everything's early! Well, perhaps not everything, but enough things to be of special note…one Cape May, three Blackburnians, one bay-breasted, one blackpoll, three Wilson's, and even a mourning warbler. Plenty of early returnees, all riding

along the front edge of migration's bell curve. Only Canada and Connecticut were missing from the usual cadre of late-blooming warblers. Plenty of individuals were also accounted for, including 65 yellow and 150 yellow-rumped warblers. The two golden-winged warblers were the only ones I had this season, and I worry that this bird is simply going to become harder and harder to find in the future. A total of 26 warbler species were tallied at the Trail this day, and as it turned out this was my most productive warbler day of the season. Although 4 May is decidedly early for a peak day, the weather patterns leading up to the day (a period of steady northerly winds suddenly changing to southerly) helped to predict that a good day was likely in store. Predicting migration based on weather patterns isn't an exact science, but one can make an educated guess. I guessed right on this one.

May 7—A nice array of 24 warbler species, but flycatchers stole the show this day. Single yellow-bellied, alder, and olive-sided flycatchers tied or beat my earliest spring records for these species. It was indeed a treat to hit the Trail again with birding *maestro* Jon Dunn, and actually be able to prove to him that flycatchers can and do show up before they're allowed. Glad to help, Jon. Right about this date is when I usually expect the peak of warbler migration to begin, and I recorded 18 species in numbers of five or better.

May 8—What do you do when you discover a bird that no one *should* believe? You sneak it into a commentary, that's what. We were almost alone on the Trail this Monday morning, which seemed odd for a peak-season date, weekday or not. So consequently when a bird popped out of the shrubbery a few yards off the Trail, no one else was there to see it with us. And when one is dealing with a bird that might represent a first state record, that's not good. We recognized instantly that the bird appeared most like a gray-cheeked thrush: a nice bird, but certainly not unexpected. Except this bird was a much warmer brown on the back than any gray-cheeked thrush I've ever seen around these parts. Its tail was an even brighter rufous than the back, but was never pumped in the habit of a hermit thrush. It had a mostly complete, thin, gray eyering, along with a grayish face and spotted breast. And its bill seemed much too yellow for a typical gray-cheeked. We watched it for several minutes as it perched politely in the open, on the edge of a small bush just off the trail and in good sunlight to boot. And then it flew away.

We alerted several birders we met on the Trail that day to keep their eyes open, but as far as we know, it was never seen again. Our diagnosis? The field marks seemed to best point to a Bicknell's thrush. This recent split from gray-cheeked thrush nests in the mountains of the far northeastern US and Canada, and winters in the Caribbean, having breeding and wintering habitats entirely segregated from gray-cheeked. Its song and calls also differ markedly form gray-cheeked's, and the bird is nowhere particularly common. And as far as we know, it has no business ever being in Ohio.

Why not submit this record to the Ohio Bird Records Committee for a proper peer review? After all, it might be accepted, and become an important part of the historical record. But much more likely, it would not be accepted, for a variety of reasons. And since I'm a voting member of the Committee, I'm already intimately familiar with the conservative stance the Committee *must* take. Some points given for non-acceptance might include: 1) Bicknell's thrush has not established a pattern of vagrancy that might

explain its presence here (a 1933 Ohio specimen might represent this species, but we're still trying to sort that record out); 2) no photographs were obtained; 3) no other observers corroborated the sighting; 4) the smaller size of Bicknell's compared to gray-cheeked was not noted; 5) no vocalizations were heard; 6) more details are desired for such a rare species; and 7) identification can be tricky for this species.

All of the above are valid reasons to consider voting against this record in my judgment. As a Committee member, I would be required to vote on this very record if it were submitted—and based on the reasoning given above, in the spirit of conservatism I'd probably have to cast a "no" vote on my own record, even though I believe it to be correctly identified. And that would be about as much fun as a swift kick in the head. So here we stand, in rarity limbo. Perhaps the future will show us that Bicknell's thrush isn't so unbelievable for Ohio after all, and perhaps, in time, this record might have some significance after all. But, at the very least, it helped add extra spice to this column.

May 13—International Migratory Bird Day is not usually one of my favorite days to bird the Trail. Yes, it falls during the traditional peak of migration, but as it's on a weekend the Trail is typically clogged with as many birders as birds. Attendance seemed a bit down this year, which made it easier to slowly roam the boardwalk and rack up 20 species of warblers, although 16 species were represented by five or fewer individuals, with 15 northern waterthrushes a notable exception. We had decided to arrive early, hoping to avoid the worst of the crowds, but apparently we should have arrived *very* early. As it turned out, perennial IMBD big-sitter Tom Bartlett and co-miserant Vic Fazio had heard a singing chuck-will's-widow before dawn, providing a long-overdue first record for the Trail. Although we looked for it after dawn, we had to settle for a nifty whip-poor-will in the woods behind one of the tents set up for the IMBD festivities.

The undisputed star of the day, however, and of the spring for me, was Ohio's second-ever painted bunting, a fetching female dining at the feeders of the Sportsmen's Migratory Bird Center for most of the day. Having been out of state for the first Ohio record a few years back, this was a real treat for me, as I'm sure it was for the hordes of other observers present that day. Chalk one up for the good guys.

I'm still at a loss, however, to understand one troubling aspect of what turned out to be one of the Trail's finest rarity days ever. Normally, a confirmed Kirtland's warbler on the trail is BIG news, but most people present this day probably had no idea that a Kirtland's was even present. This particular female had been captured in banding nets at Navarre Marsh, some eight miles down the road from the Trail. To my knowledge, all of the birds on display at the banding tent at Magee had been captured at Navarre and driven over to Magee for banding under public scrutiny. I can understand how this may be beneficial to birds in general (banding demonstrations bring the public closer to the birds, and one hopes they will engender increased concern for bird and habitat protection), but I don't see how this arrangement benefits the individual birds captured for banding. And I certainly can't understand the decision to transport a Kirtland's warbler, a critically Endangered Species, the eight miles so that it might be banded in public. Obviously, any banding-related avian fatality is most unfortunate, but one might at least say that it was offered on the altar of "the interests of science."

But I'm not sure what interests were served by the decisions made regarding this Kirtland's. Its loss would have been tragic, and verge on criminality, if only morally. As far as I know, it was returned to Navarre and released there, after being banded at Magee.

Some thoughts spring to mind: 1) the bird could have been banded at Navarre and then released there—the public can view dozens of Kirtland's warblers on their breeding grounds just a few hours' drive away in Michigan—as I doubt anyone would want to risk this individual just for the sake of seeing it banded; 2) if no licensed banders were present at Navarre to band it there, the bird could simply have been photographed and released unbanded, thereby eliminating the risks involved in transport to Magee; 3) even worse, the persons operating the nets at Navarre may not have identified the bird as a Kirtland's, and unknowingly sent it along with the other more common species over to Magee. Regardless of the thought-process involved, I was personally greatly disappointed by the decision to transport it to Magee, and as you can probably sense, I remain disgusted with the whole scenario. This diatribe isn't meant to condemn bird banding or bird banders, not by a long shot. Nor is it meant to condemn the good-faith efforts over the years on the part of the banding operation in question. But in this case, questions need to be answered. Honest lapses of judgment happen. Let's hope that's all it was in this case.

May 20—Back to birding as it should be—fun. Twenty-two warbler species were still present but eight were represented by only a single individual. Included in these eight were a late orange-crowned warbler and my only Connecticut warbler for the season. Ten mourning warblers were as expected for the date, given a good migrational push. Ten yellow-bellied flycatchers and five alder flycatchers were also in nice but reasonable numbers, while a summer tanager was an unexpected bonus.

May 24—My last day at the Trail this spring. I usually try to make it at least once during early June, if only to be slowly weaned rather than quit cold-turkey. When birders are outnumbered by supercilious beach-goers on the boardwalk, it is time to move on. Not to be dissuaded, however, two olive-sided flycatchers were still present, and 11 species of warblers lingered bravely in the face of the advancing season. And fittingly, my first-ever female Lawrence's warbler, the recessive hybrid of blue-winged and golden-winged warblers, put in an all-too-brief appearance in the shrubbery at the far west end of the parking lot. She popped quickly into view, peeked around for a bit, and then was gone. A fleeting glimpse—spring migration in a nutshell, I should think.

Stately Visitors...
Common Ravens in Ohio: The Past, Present, and Future

by Mike Busam

Common Ravens in Ohio: A Brief History

"The Raven," wrote William Dawson in 1903, "has more dignity, and as a species, less flexibility than the Crow." Tied closely as they were to the once extensive forests of Ohio, it is not surprising that soon after Europeans settled Ohio, ravens began disappearing along with the state's woodlands. By the early 1800s, ravens were no longer to be found in Ohio's central and southern counties, except as occasional wanderers, whereas in northern Ohio they were "still frequently encountered near Cleveland during the 1850s," though by the 1870s that had changed, and ravens were reduced in status to rare winter visitors (Peterjohn 1989).

Ravens clung to the Black Swamp area in northwestern Ohio until the late 1880s, but essentially disappeared from that part of the state between 1900 and 1905 (Peterjohn 1989). In Volume I of *The Birds of Ohio*, Dawson writes of unsubstantiated claims of ravens breeding in Fulton County in the late 1800s, but notes that for all practical purposes "the relentless warfare of the pioneers has thrust [the common raven] almost entirely out of bounds."

And Ohio remained out of bounds to ravens until early 1946. While walking on the frozen Lake Erie near a group of ice fishing shanties, Milton Trautman observed a raven on three separate occasions between 20 January and 6 March. On each occasion, the raven was seen flying from South Bass Island towards Middle Bass Island. "The characteristics of this distinctive species were noted," he wrote (Trautman 1956), "especially the wedge-shaped tail, soaring flight, and croaking voice." On 20 January he was also able to make a direct comparison of the raven with six nearby crows. Fifty-two years would pass before Ohio's next accepted common raven sighting in March of 1998, when once again the species was seen along Lake Erie. A year later, the Ohio Bird Records Committee accepted yet another raven sighting. On top of these two confirmed records have been a few tantalizing, though unconfirmed, sightings, including one from the summer of 1999 at the Egypt Valley Wildlife Area in Belmont County (ODNR news release, 10 Jan 2000).

So given the spate of recent confirmed and possible sightings, can Ohio birders expect to start seeing more common ravens in the future? Will common ravens once again breed in Ohio? Maybe...one thing is for certain, though: populations of breeding common ravens are nearly all around us—"us" being the state of Ohio.

Common Ravens in States Bordering Ohio

Of the five states and one Canadian province bordering Ohio—Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ontario—only Indiana lacks a population of breeding common ravens. Never truly abundant in the Hoosier State, ravens disappeared completely as breeders by the mid-1890s. Prior to that, the most regular breeding site was a sandstone cliff known as "Ravens Rock," located in southwestern Indiana's Dubois County (Mumford and Keller 1984). The last recorded year for breeding ravens at Ravens Rock was 1894, also the year of the last 19th-century sighting of the