

Introducing Berlin Lake

by Ben Morrison

Located in Portage, Stark, and Mahoning counties in the northeast, Berlin Lake is among the best fall shorebird areas of inland Ohio. The lake, along with some 6800 surrounding acres, is owned and managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and offers diverse habitats which in turn make for exceptional bird and wildlife viewing in all seasons.

In 1943 Berlin Lake was formed by damming the Mahoning River. Its purpose is to control water levels downstream to protect against flooding and to insure water for navigation as far downstream as the Ohio River. At summer pool the lake's level is lowered significantly from maximum pool of 5500 acres to a surface area of 3590 acres. This change in water level creates approximately 1200 acres of mudflats. When their appearance coincides with shorebird migration, these mudflats attract large numbers and many species.

Timing is important. Water is drawn from the reservoir at a rate of approximately one foot per month from July through October or November. Nearly every year some lowering can be expected, though in a summer with above-average rainfall the reservoir will not have extensive mudflats. Given average or below-average rainfall, however, the shorebird viewing should be excellent. Because its water level does not normally fall significantly until early August, the lake does not offer many suitable areas during the early portion of the shorebird migration except in drought conditions. Typically, the first week in August here is the best time to head for the mudflats. From this time until the end of September has generally been the best period for shorebird encounters.

The mudflats begin to appear in the southwestern regions of the reservoir. When the lake first shows signs of lowering, the place to go is Greenbower Rd. (#1 on map). To get there, go 4.3 miles south from the SR 224/SR 225 intersection, then west on Greenbower Rd. for 0.8 mile. There is a parking area on the north side, just before the bridge. Walking west, observers can easily see an osprey nest northwest from the bridge, where a lone utility pole is the usual nest site. A walk further west will reveal the first of the mudflats.

Later in the year as the water recedes further, move north to Price Rd. (#2 on map), 0.8 mile north of Greenbower. From SR 225 turn west on Price Rd. and go 0.3 mile to a parking area on the right. After scanning the area north of the parking lot, walk back to the bridge and look south over the mudflats. Notice the numerous cliff swallows nesting beneath the bridge. Shorebirds may be seen from the bridge, but more than likely good looks will require a hike along the west shoreline south of the bridge. This walk can be as long as a mile and a half, to a point where you can see the dam at Deer Creek Reservoir.

The next viewing area is near the SR 225 bridge (#3 on map), and located 0.6 mile north of Price Rd. The mudflats lie west of the bridge, so morning viewing is recommended. The bridge itself offers a good vantage point, but hiking the south shore will get you closer, with the sun at the proper angle for optimal viewing. By hiking one can also see an area not visible from the bridge. Over the years, the east side of the SR 225 bridge has been one of the lake's most productive areas, either because of its sheer size or perhaps simply the timing of draw-downs. This area does not usually feature extensive mudflats until the end of August or early September. For best viewing, park on the north end of the bridge and walk back south to where the northeast shoreline is accessible. It is almost a necessity to walk out onto the extensive mudflats, but the hike is well worth it. When the lake is at its lowest one can walk for at least two miles along the northeast shoreline, scanning hundreds of acres of prime shorebird habitat. This area has had marbled godwits and Baird's, white-rumped, stilt, western, and buff-breasted sandpipers, as well as many others.

Another way to reach this area is from German Church Rd. (#4 on map). Go 0.4 mile north from the SR 225 bridge and east on German Church Rd. proceeding 0.5 mile to a parking area on the left. From the parking lot walk south across German Church Rd. to a point overlooking the reservoir. This overlook provides an excellent view of an area behind the island that cannot be seen from the SR 225 bridge. From here the shoreline can be walked going northeast late in the season.

Another good location is along Willow Creek (#6 on map). This area is found by going 2.6 miles north of the SR 225 bridge, then east at the Berlin Lake sign for 1.0 mile to the parking area. Willow Creek runs north of the parking lot. The high embankment at the margin of the parking lot provides a good vantage point for scanning the mudflats and creek bed below. This stop is ideal for those not wanting to walk far. Another good area for viewing without much hiking can be found at the bridge on SR 14 (#9 on map) 1.0 mile south of the SR 224/SR 14 junction.

An area worthy of mention is the old railroad trestle (#12 on map). Although the property is privately owned at this time and cannot be accessed by the public, it is included here because the US Army Corps of Engineers is pursuing purchasing the land, and with luck it will be opened to the public in the near future. The trestle bisects the lake at one of its widest points, creating a lot of potential for finding many types of birds.

Table 1 presents a compilation of shorebirds seen over the last nine years. Two additional species seen in the vicinity are not included in the table. These birds—whimbrel and willet—were seen at Walborn Reservoir, which lies 3.8 miles west of Berlin Reservoir on Price Rd.

When looking for shorebirds in this area, please remember to be cautious walking the mudflats. The consistency of the mud can really be hard to judge. As a rule, stay on the dry-looking areas. It is also prudent to go with a friend if at all possible, especially in the remote areas. Finally, remember much of the area surrounding the reservoir is public hunting land, so be mindful of the hunting seasons.

Other Birding Opportunities Nearby and at Other Seasons

Springtime can also be rewarding at Berlin Lake. The open water attracts many waterfowl, and large tracts of fields and forest nearby make for tremendous passerine watching. The German Church area (#4 on map) has been productive for migrating as well as resident species. The area north of the parking lot has fallow fields with fencerows and thickets of viburnum and crabapple. Mowed paths make this area easily accessible.

Another location is found 0.4 mile north of German Church Rd. on SR 225. Turn into a parking area just north of high-tension power line (#5 on map). Another osprey nest is nearby: follow the trail east beside a grassy wetland to the first impoundment, where the nest sits atop a tower. One can usually find several red-headed woodpeckers year-round in this spot. The trail continues through fields and second-growth woods to another impoundment.

The Willow Creek road (#6 on map) is probably the most magnificent area of Berlin Lake. The trail begins at the east end of the parking area and continues east onto a peninsula. For the first half-mile the fallow fields and shrubbery make for good sparrow and warbler habitat. The road winds through a beautiful beech-maple forest ringing with songs of warblers, thrushes, tanagers, and many other species in season. The trail continues for about a mile to the end of the peninsula.

Another area along Willow Creek lies north of SR 224 (#7 on map). Located 1.5 miles east of the SR 224/SR 225 junction, it is best approached by walking 0.2 mile east of

Table 1. Shorebird species encountered at Berlin Lake, Ohio from 1991-1999.

Species	Max #: Date	# of Years (of 9)	Early Arrival Date	Departure Date
Semipalmated Plover	27 (9/4/1997)	9	7/18/1991	10/16/1994
American Golden-Plover	22 (9/24/1994)	5	8/21/1999	10/16/1994
Black-bellied Plover	12 (10/4/1998)	5	8/24/1999	10/19/1998
Killdeer	502 (8/13/1999)	9	*	11/7/1998
American Avocet	1 (9/22/1994)	1	9/22/1994	10/9/1994
Greater Yellowlegs	32 (9/26/1997)	9	8/8/1999	10/19/1998
Lesser Yellowlegs	500+ (9/19/1997)	9	7/11/1991	10/12/1997
Solitary Sandpiper	45 (7/22/1999)	9	6/29/1991	9/26/1994
Spotted Sandpiper	41 (8/8/1999)	9	*	9/26/1994
Hudsonian Godwit	16 (8/19/1999)	1	8/19/1999	8/19/1999
Marbled Godwit	1 (9/18/1999)	1	9/18/1999	9/21/1999
Ruddy Turnstone	12 (9/26/1994)	1	9/26/1994	9/26/1994
Sanderling	8 (9/24/1994)	5	8/13/1999	10/9/1994
Semipalmated Sandpiper	60 (8/29/1999)	6	7/9/1991	9/26/1994
Western Sandpiper	1 (8/23/1995)	3	8/23/1999	9/26/1997
Least Sandpiper	200+ (7/11/1992)	9	6/29/1991	10/19/1998
White-rumped Sandpiper	27 (9/15/1999)	3	8/14/1997	10/8/1995
Baird's Sandpiper	5 (9/26/1997)	3	8/21/1999	10/8/1995
Pectoral Sandpiper	147 (8/7/1991)	9	7/9/1991	11/7/1998
Dunlin	34 (11/7/1998)	2	9/18/1994	11/7/1998
Stilt Sandpiper	40 (9/19/1997)	5	7/31/1999	10/8/1995
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	3 (9/7/1999)	2	9/1/1999	9/21/1997
Short-billed Dowitcher	8 (8/13/1999)	5	8/3/1999	9/22/1996
Long-billed Dowitcher	2 (9/24/1995)	3	8/29/1999	10/6/1996
Common Snipe	10 (9/26/1998)	9	7/5/1992	10/12/1997
American Woodcock	10+*	9	*	—
Wilson's Phalarope	1 (8/18/1997)	1	8/18/1997	8/18/1997
Red-necked Phalarope	1 (9/6/1997)	3	9/6/1997	9/18/1999

* Nesting Species

the parking area to an oil well road. In this area several interesting warbler species have been noted nesting and during migration. Golden-winged warblers have been seen here from time to time.

The SR 224 bridge (#9 on map) crosses the reservoir 2.5 miles east of the Deerfield circle. This site provides an excellent view of large expanses of the lake. Gulls, terns, waterfowl, and occasional bald eagles can be seen here. Nearly a hundred pairs of cliff swallows use the bridge as a nest site.

The dam and the gorge downstream (#8 on map) are worth checking. The dam is a good vantage point to see the deepest portion of the lake. Here in late winter and early spring loons, grebes, and diving ducks can be seen. Below the dam is a deep gorge with native hemlocks along its flanks. This Canadian type of habitat provides potential for nesting northern species. To get to the dam go 1.0 mile west of the SR 224 bridge to Bonner Rd., then north 1.0 mile to the Berlin Lake Dam sign. The parking area is 0.6 mile further.

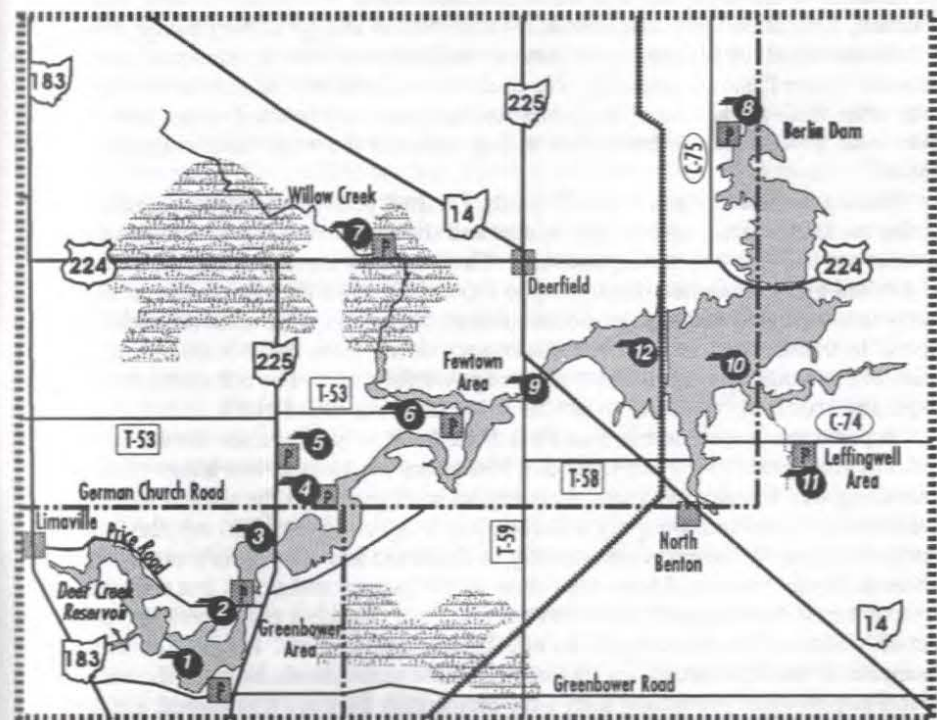
The Mill Creek Campground (#10 on map) on Bedell Rd. is a wonderful place to camp, and offers many birding opportunities. It features mature trees, open spaces, and an overlook of the reservoir. To get to the campground go east of the SR 224 bridge for 0.7 mile, then south 0.5 mile on Bedell Rd. The Resource Manager's office and Visitors' center are on the right right, just north of the campground. There, maps and information are

provided, and the staff will be glad to answer any questions you may have about the area. The Corp of Engineers' Resource Manager's Office can be reached at 330-547-3781, or on the Web at <http://www.lrp.usace.army.mil/rec/lakes/berlin.htm>. The postal address is Berlin Lake Resource Manager, 7400 Bedell Rd., Berlin Center, OH 44401-9707.

The Leffingwell Wildlife Area, located southeast of the reservoir, is a large tract of land managed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. This area is quite diverse, ranging from open grassland to deciduous hardwood forest. This array of habitats supplies the ingredients for quite a number of nesting as well as migratory bird species. To get to this area turn south off SR 224 onto Bedell Rd. and proceed 1.5 miles to Leffingwell Rd. and turn east. Continue east for 0.2 mile to a parking area on the south side of the road. A trail begins at the south side of the parking lot.

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Map of Berlin Lake. Numbers correspond to locations mentioned in the accompanying article. Map produced by Larry Rosche.