

Orchard Oriole: One was in the S. Chagrin Res'n on 6 Jul (**K. Metcalf**). Multiple birds were seen at Killbuck (six on 9 Jul, **S. Snyder**), ONWR (four on the ONWRC of 7 Jul, one carrying food), and *Tuscarawas* (four migrants on 27 Jul, **E. Schlabach**).

Purple Finch: **R. Rickard** had two at Streetsboro Bog, *Portage*, 10 Jul. High count was ~12 present daily at feeders in Damascus, *Mahoning*, during the period (**B&D Lane**).

Pine Siskin: **J. Pogacnik** confirmed breeding at Lakeshore Res'n in *Lake*, a nest with three young, during the period.

Contributors

We are very grateful to the following observers who made their sightings reports available: Chuck Anderson, Matt Anderson, Hank Armstrong, Jim Arnold, Carole Babyak, Zac Baker, Brian Barchus, Dorothea Barker, Tom Bartlett, Kathy Beal, Bob Beitzel, Ned Bixler, Steve Bobonick, Dana Bollin, Margaret Bowman, Lori Brumbaugh, Mike Busam, Jason Cade, Neill Cade, Granville Carey, Tom Carrolan, Ann Chasar, Dwight Chasar, Chris Clingman, John Condit, Bob Conlon, Mike Crofts, Becky Cullen, Sharon Cummings, Leo Deininger, Dave Dister, Doug Dunakin, Micki Dunakin, Marcus England, Vic Fazio, Duane Ferris, Frank Frick, Jayme Fuller, Mike Gallaway, Larry Gara, Paul Gardner, Peg Gatch, Bruce Glick, Jeff Grabmeier, Joe Hammond, Betty Hardesty, Rob Harlan, Paul Haskins, Andrea Haslage, Jim Haw, John Herman, Craig Holt, Joe Hildreth, Rebecca Hinkle, Hank Hiris, Sally Hiris, Dave Hochadel, Dave Horn, William Hull, Mary Louise Johnston, Milan Keim, Tom Kemp, Fran Kidd, Ron Kolde, Bob Lane, Denise Lane, Gabe Leidy, Tim Leslie, Greg Links, Sean Lucas, Trevor Manley, Jim McCormac, Kevin Metcalf, Greg Miller, Joseph Miller, Ben Morrison, Bev Neubauer, Ed Neubauer, Doug Overacker, Anne Paschall, Haans Petruschke, Ed Pierce, John Pogacnik, Nancy Powlick, Len Powlick, Frank Renfrow, Richard Rickard, Craig Rieker, Randel Rogers, Paul Rodewald, Mary Anne Romito, Sue Ross, Thomas Ross, Ed Roush, Bob Royse, Dan Sanders, Regina Schieltz, Ed Schlabach, Tommy Schroeder, Joe Sedransk, Ron Sempier, Jon Seymour, Mark Shieldcastle, Troy Shively, Elaine Snively, Su Snyder, Pat Soehnen, Brad Sparks, Jacob Spindelow, Bill Stanley, Lee Sterrenburg, John Switzer, John Tetzloff, Laurel Theriault, Rob Thorn, Elliot Tramer, Gary Troyer, Doug Vogus, Sandy Wagner, John Watts, Wayne Wauligman, Bill Whan, John Yochum, Emery Yoder, Leroy Yoder, Sean Zadar, Bill Zimmerman, Brian Zwiebel. We also owe a debt to internet services managed by Chuck Anderson, Vic Fazio, Ned Keller, and Gene Storer, as well as to the editors of *The Bobolink*. 🐦



This male yellow-headed blackbird appeared at a Greenville, Darke County, feeder on 1-2 June 2002. Photo by Mary Louise Johnston.

Further Afield

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Back in the mid-1980s, a hit-list was hatched. After 10 or so years of fairly active, but local, birding, I finally acquired a vehicle to call my own. It got eight miles to the gallon, but who's counting, and, come to think of it, would have been a highly-ranked entry into the local demolition derby. Nonetheless, I suddenly felt the urge to broaden my birding horizons statewide. All of Ohio beckoned, and many Ohio birds, heretofore unseen and unlisted by me, seemed within my reach. I knew I wanted to see 300 species in Ohio; many birders had advised me to establish that mark as a workable and meaningful goal. So I dutifully added up my list, kept up to that point by marking the little boxes that appeared next to the species' names in the index of the first edition of Chandler Robbins's old Golden Guide. But no matter how many times I tallied, my list simply wouldn't rise above 263 species for Ohio. Two hundred sixty-three was not good enough.

So my hit-list came to life. It consisted of 37 species not yet seen by me that seemed most likely candidates for tracking down somewhere in Ohio. I recall listing many shorebirds and gulls, also a goodly number of scarcer waterfowl, along with a few odds and ends tacked on to reach the tantalizing 300 mark. Up to that point, my efforts had been rather hit-and-miss, but gratefully once a plan was concocted the new birds came rather quickly. This was due in large part to a network of friends, who would "call" me on a device known as a "telephone." Perhaps some of you will remember a device such as this; it was commonly used to disseminate birding information before the advent of the Internet. For my part, whenever I turned up a rare bird of interest to my friends, I would return the favor. We actually spoke to one another on these telephonic devices! As archaic as this technology might seem today, it certainly paid large dividends for my Ohio list.

It seems ironic to me now, after almost 20 years of concentrated effort, that I don't even recall what my 300th Ohio species ultimately turned out to be. The achievement of my goal became less important than the chase itself, and so the chase continues for me today, even though my original goal was reached 15 years ago. Of course as the list grows, so does the difficulty in adding to it, but this only makes the rewards sweeter. Sweet is good.

And in case anyone was wondering, only one bird remains to be crossed off my original hit-list of 37. Thankfully, my first western kingbird—the next to last—was finally observed this July, with the cooperative Butler County bird putting on a show for us on what turned out to be the last evening it was found. No, I did not collect it and place it on my mantle. I do not have a mantle. This leaves the elusive yellow rail as the only remaining species yet unseen on my original hit-list of 37. Keep in mind that I offer a handsome finders' fee...

Now, I'm not sure what any of the above has to do with introducing a series of pieces on finding the rare birds of Ohio, as promised in my most recent column. Perhaps it will serve to illustrate that with a plan of attack, long-term goals may be accomplished over time. Perhaps it will serve only as a desperate plea for someone to find a yellow rail, call me on the phone, and sit on it till I can get there. Whatever the case, with this column we initiate a series of short treatments of Ohio's rare birds. I envision this series appearing irregularly, whenever I can't think of anything else to write about. The birds to be dealt with are those species treated only as "Rare" in the new *Ohio Bird Records Committee Checklist of the Birds of Ohio*, a copy of which all *Ohio Cardinal* subscribers should have received as a complimentary insertion in the most recent issue, Spring 2002. These "Rare" birds are the species that beef up a standard Ohio list into a substantial one, birds which are more difficult to find than the "Uncommon" ones, which will be stumbled upon sooner or later, which are easier to find than the "Casual" or "Accidental" species, documentation of which requires OBRC acceptance to become published as part of the permanent historical record. For any of these latter species, game plans become tenuous: patterns of occurrence may form over long periods of time, but then again they may not. If you learn of a casual or accidental species hanging out at your friendly local sewage lagoons, no complex plan is necessary—just go. But for the "Rare" birds, a bit of forethought just might come in handy. And so here, in digestible bite-sized chunks, we begin our series with...

Red-throated Loon

An interesting case: probably overlooked to some degree, but I also suspect small common loons might be mistakenly identified as red-throateds. Only recently have we begun to identify red-throateds as part of the fall Lakefront common loon movements, and considerable size variation within common loon populations might cause some smaller commons to be identified, based on size alone, as red-throateds. In a similar vein, how do we know that distant small, rapidly-flying loons, which might be called red-throateds, are not in fact similarly-sized Pacific loons? This is not to say that observers should simply identify all flying loons as commons, or even use the dreaded designation "loon sp."; experience is crucial towards gaining an acceptable comfort level when identifying flying loons. Come to think of it, why don't we ever hear of an *inland* flyby red-throated? Plenty of flyby commons are seen inland every year, but virtually never a red-throated. To be on the safe side, I feel the potential first-time red-throated loon seeker would be best served to look on one of our large inland reservoirs, where direct stationary comparisons with common loons are sometimes possible. Inland reservoirs worth an especially careful look include C. J. Brown Reservoir (Clark County), Caesar Creek Reservoir (Warren County), Hoover Reservoir (Franklin/Delaware Counties), and any of the larger Akron-area lakes (Summit/Portage Counties). Despite my personal preference for identification on inland lakes, don't overlook Lake Erie, as inland vs. lakefront reports run nearly 50/50; keep in mind though that many, if not most, lakefront records represent flybys. So, when to look? Spring migrants are very rare, but most

are encountered during the last quarter of March and the first quarter of April. Fall migrants are somewhat more numerous, but are still rare. Peak time during the fall is the first three quarters of November. On the water, look for the red-throated's daintier size and demeanor, thin upturned bill, cleaner neck, and often spotted back, in comparison to common loon.

Red-necked Grebe

Fairly weak on the wing, grebes are particularly prone to weather-related fallout, when hostile conditions can force large numbers of birds down onto whatever water is handy, and unfortunately sometimes onto wholly inappropriate habitats as well. As part of the unprecedented red-necked grebe fallout of February-May 1994, when 100+ birds were found scattered across Ohio due to the cruelly frigid conditions which froze over Lakes Superior, Huron, and Michigan, and forced any dawdling northern Great Lakes grebes down our way, wayward unfortunates were found here in such unlikely situations as a Hardin County farm field and the parking lot of Summit Mall in Akron. Considering that only about 250 red-neckeds had ever been reported in Ohio prior to this fallout, one can readily see why 100+ in a few months-worth of 1994 was considered rather unusual at the time. Well, it's still pretty dangd unusual. Most observers are fortunate to find one bird a year, and most of those are discovered in the fall, when peak movements occur in the middle two quarters of November, but especially 16-23 November. Lesser numbers are found in the spring, but the peak (if you can call it that) is longer and more gradual, extending from about 16 March – 23 April. This species seems to be about equally likely inland as along Lake Erie; just head for the big water and look for a big grebe. If this is not successful, visit Summit Mall.

Eared Grebe

Throughout most of the 1980s, a late fall trip to C. J. Brown Reservoir near Springfield would have been the prescription for finding an eared grebe in Ohio, as up to five birds at a time returned year after year to this productive body of water. Although this species can still be found there irregularly, it can no longer be counted on at this location. Fear not, however, as eared grebe is still to be found somewhere in the state, averaging about five birds per annum. The odds are moderately greater to locate one inland vs. on Lake Erie, but certainly not great enough to spend an inordinate amount of time inland at the expense of the Lake. Any large body of water will do, although far fewer are found in the southeastern quadrant of the state, as is true for most waterbirds. As a general rule, don't head to southeastern Ohio if you're looking for aquatic avian rarities. In the spring, eareds may be expected the last half of March through April, with a definite peak during the last quarter of March. As for the fall, the first three quarters of November are most productive, but if my list depended on it, I'd be looking most actively during the second week of the month. As a caveat, here is another species that can cause some ID headaches, especially in the spring when both eared and horned grebe plumages move from basic to alternate. Almost any plumage variation seems possible during this period; however, the more domed head and thinner, slightly upturned bill of the eared, as well as the somewhat thinner, more graceful neck, should settle the matter.

American White Pelican

If there's a more accommodating rare Ohio species, I don't know what it might be. Once this bird finds a spot to its liking, odds favor an extended stay, sometimes lasting several weeks or more. Small flocks are quite possible. The western Lake Erie marshes produce the most sightings, but any large, fishy inland body of water, especially in the western half of the state, can also do the trick. "Spring" sightings tend to fall between the second quarter of April and the second quarter of June, although the last three quarters of May seem to have the edge. Fall sightings are most typically expected between the last two quarters of September through November, but without a discernible peak. Identification should hopefully not be a problem with the species, as it prefers easily-scanned open areas. It is also white, huge, and has a big honking beak. Please do not misidentify this species. Thank you.

Little Blue Heron

If I were writing this column prior to the 1900s, there would be no need to include this species, as no "official" state record had yet been accepted. However, if I were writing in the 1930s, it wouldn't have been included either, this time because little blue herons would have been far too common for inclusion in a column on rare birds. How do 1185 birds in 40 counties from late July to early September 1930 grab you? This tally would prove to be the little blue's high-water mark in Ohio, but large numbers appeared as late summer irruptives from the south throughout the 30s and into the 40s, dwindling to a trickle in the 50s. Despite their ups and downs, in recent years little blues have proven consistently rare, with no concentrations of any consequence reported. Nonetheless, the timing of fall arrivals remains today as it did in the past, with birds expected about the first of August and later through mid-September. Contrary to older invasions, now we may also expect a spring migration, lasting from the last quarter of April through May, with the last quarter of May the least productive. Heck, this species has even nested in the West Sister Island (Lucas County) heronry in the 1980s and early 1990s, albeit with only a pair or two each year. Although it might seem slightly illogical, more little blues are found inland than along Lake Erie; in recent years, roughly a 10/7 inland/lakefront ratio has proven to be the case. I suspect the southwestern Ohio wetlands now offer the best bet, with locations such as Miami-Whitewater Wetlands (Hamilton County) and Gilmore Ponds (Butler County) coming to mind. Potentially, however, any marshy/mudflatty areas around the state could attract this species, although again I would spend less time looking in southeastern Ohio than elsewhere. Also keep in mind that all age classes can be found here. Adults should pose no identification pitfalls, and calico young should produce only momentary mental gymnastics. All-white juveniles could certainly be overlooked, however, as a snowy egret, or even conceivably a great egret, at least by the frighteningly unobservant.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron

Of all the rare species to be covered in this series, this one has proven to be one of the most consistent, at least in the past several years. Here has been the formula for success. Drive down residential Preston Road in east Columbus near the border

of Bexley; stop when you come to the big white splats in the middle of the road; look up, but carefully. Up to three nests per year have been located in this attractive area for about six years now, with some nests even placed directly over the road. Why this species would be willing to nest so close to human disturbance in highly urbanized areas such as this one, and also in a rather unkempt Dayton neighborhood (at least through the mid-1990s) is certainly a curiosity, since they will also nest in very remote streamside locations across the state. Nearby shallow, rocky streams overflowing with crayfish seem to be their most essential requirement, but just the same, huge expanses of seemingly suitable habitat go unoccupied every year. It seems quite likely that many individuals and nestings simply go unnoticed due to this species' nocturnal habits and unpredictability away from a few established sites. Even these established sites may be occupied for only a few years; if a nest site is readily viewable, my advice would be to go immediately and readily view it, before the species again fades into obscurity. Any sighting of a yellow-crowned away from an established site is a red-letter event, but even this does not always indicate nesting, as pure migrants may appear in April and May and again in the fall, although in tiny numbers, generally in mid- to late August. Migrants may also appear in the western Lake Erie marshes, as well as in the more expected streamside habitats statewide. First-year birds may be the most overlooked age class, being quite similar to first-year black-crowned night-herons. Any first-year night-heron demands close scrutiny, especially one along a rocky stream. Wherever you are, look for the solid black bill and small white spots on the upper surface of the yellow-crowned, and largely yellow bill and larger white upper-surface spots on the black-crowned.

In the next installment of this series, we hope to cover many of our rare waterfowl—greater white-fronted goose, brant, Eurasian wigeon, harlequin duck, etc. Between now and then, you should have some time to track down some of the rare species just covered. Ready?...begin. 🦢



Butler County's Voice of America property hosted numerous sedge wrens this summer. This one was digiscoped there on 15 July 2002 by Bill Hull.