

Erie. Finches perform very well, including 253 evening grosbeaks on the Portsmouth CBC of December 31 and at least 10 pine grosbeaks in the Cleveland area during the period. A Harris's sparrow is outstanding in Marietta in February, but is topped by a boreal chickadee "banded and photographed" at Waite Hill, east of Cleveland, on December 23-24.

Winter 1982-83

President Reagan mulls over his "Star Wars" defense system proposal. Toni Basil's "Mickey" tops the Billboard chart during December, to the everlasting embarrassment of all music fans of this period. Here's a victory for the "mild winters equal few finches" contingent—this winter is "one of the mildest..." and finches are essentially a no-show throughout. Gulls come on strong, including maxima of 11 glaucous, three Iceland, and 640 great black-backed gulls along Lake Erie. This is not to mention the new European immigrant lesser black-backed gulls, Ohio's second California gull, a black-headed gull, and a black-legged kittiwake. Other rarities? Why, of course: a prairie falcon at Rickenbacker Air Force Base in Columbus January 21; a grasshopper sparrow in Butler County February 5; and a purple gallinule recovered from a Mansfield residence February 21, only to succumb the next day, and to wander erratically no more.


Winter 1992-93

Under the George H. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations, in December U.S. troops are sent to Somalia to aid in U.N. famine relief efforts. The World Trade Center in New York City is bombed February 26 with five killed. On February 28 a failed attempt is made to arrest David Koresh in Waco, Texas. Hmm, here is another "unusually mild" winter, and a corresponding "absence of many regular boreal passerines." Whether there is any significance, who's to say? Rarities do not disappoint, however, and include a Ross's goose at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in February, a dapper male Barrow's goldeneye at Avon Lake on February 28, and a black-throated gray warbler in Brown County through February 16.

Winter 2002-03

See Bill Whan's seasonal report elsewhere in this issue. It presumably includes information on finches, gulls, and rarities. We can only hope.

Winter 2012-13

On our return trip, our time machine accidentally skips past our destination and pauses briefly during the winter of 2012-13 before yanking us back to spring 2003. But in 2012-13, we can see three species of hummingbirds attempting to winter in Ohio. We see American crows, great horned owls, and all other permanent residents back at expected "pre-West Nile Virus" population levels. We see mind-numbing hybrid gull swarms infesting the lakefront. We see a group of die-hard birders attempting to slap a name on each and every one. And we see lots more birders just trying to ignore them altogether. If I squint hard enough, I think I can see myself in that latter group. It's funny, I seem happy enough... 

Annals of Pelagic Birding in Ohio: Black-capped Petrel

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If a company of ghosts were suddenly to 'materialize' before us, make strange gestures and depart silently, leaving only their chilly shrouds behind them for memories of their visit, we should know about as much of their whence and whither, their 'life histories,' in short, as we know now of these strange wanderers from the trackless deep.

—W. L. Dawson on this species, in *The Birds of Ohio* (1903)

A century ago, the black-capped petrel *Pterodroma hasitata* was a bird of mystery, its very existence subject to debate. As recently as 1928, Alexander's work on pelagic birds called it "perhaps now extinct." Today we know it to be a Caribbean breeder, with a few thousand pairs nesting in mountainous areas of Hispaniola (Wingate 1964, Lee & Vina 1993). At least a few can be seen in deep ocean waters off our southeast coast throughout the year, their presence continuous because young birds remain at sea for four to six years after fledging (Imber 1985). It has been recorded at a number of inland spots in eastern North America, almost always accompanied by severe storms. The black-capped petrel has a place on Ohio's official list, and among neighboring states and provinces also on the lists for Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Ontario.

The Petrels of 1898

The inclusion of black-capped petrel in Ohio's avifauna is based on events during two windy October days 104 years ago in the Cincinnati area. In language far less figurative than Rev. Dawson's, one Josua Lindahl of Cincinnati wrote up this occurrence in a general note "The Black-capped Petrel (*Aestrelata hasitata*) on the Ohio River at Cincinnati" for *The Auk* for 1899 (Lindahl 1899a):

A specimen of this oceanic bird was noticed yesterday (Oct. 5, 1898) on the river at the east end of Cincinnati by two young men who approached it on a boat, close enough to hit it with an oar. It was brought alive to the Museum of Natural History. Its skin will be preserved in the museum. It proved to be an adult female.

A young male of the same species was taken the same evening on one of the bridges connecting Cincinnati with the Kentucky shore. It was seen fluttering about the electric lamp, and finally struck the glass globe¹ and fell down on the bridge where it was picked up by the bridge watchman. The specimen was brought to the Zoölogical Gardens in Cincinnati where it lived one day and was then given to Mr. Charles Dury, in whose collection the skin will be preserved. Mr. Dury, who skinned both birds, tells me they were extremely emaciated and their digestive canals contained nothing but a little watery fluid.

¹ Black-capped petrels are to a large extent nocturnal feeders (Imber 1985).

A few days after the capture of these two specimens at Cincinnati my attention was called to a notice in a Kentucky paper about an "arctic gull" captured by Captain W. L. Thomas of the ferry boat at Augusta, Ky. I at once wrote to Captain Thomas for more information. He very kindly sent me the skin of the bird together with the following notes: "The bird was discovered and caught near my boat, last Tuesday a week ago (Oct. 4) just at daybreak, exhausted; for a few days he showed fight and appeared to wander all after night...I kept him alive for ten days by forcing small minnows down his throat...The specimen I would call a Fulmar." Captain Thomas's identification proved correct. The bird is the Black-capped Petrel, and was the third specimen of its kind brought by the same gale to the Ohio River between Ohio and Kentucky. —Josua Lindahl, Cincinnati, O.

Kemsies and Randle (1953) recount the story in this way:

Lindahl in the *Auk* XVI, page 75, reports the capture alive of three individuals near Cincinnati on the Ohio River; one on the Kentucky side October 4, 1898, and two on the Ohio side the following day. Maslowski gives us the following information concerning these birds. "Only one of the three petrels is now in the C.S.N.H. Coll. One of the three was given alive to the Cincinnati Zoo where it died. Not realizing its value the specimen was thrown on the manure heap. Dury, learning of this, hurried to the Zoo, dug up the petrel and managed to save it as a skin for his private collection. Later Mr. H. K. Coale² of Chicago sent a blank check to Dury who sold the petrel skin for several hundred dollars. It is my understanding that this specimen is in the old Field Museum collection.³ This then accounts for just two of the three birds. Despite my best efforts I've never been able to learn the fate of the third one." A recent check with the Weather Bureau reveals that for several days previous to the above mentioned dates a moderately high wind (25 miles per hour) had prevailed from the Southeast. This might well account for the accidental appearance of this species now close to extinction. There are, of course, no other Ohio records.

Earlier, Karl Maslowski himself had reported the circumstances in his nature column in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (1938) thus:

Excluding the Cincinnati Warbler, the rarest bird ever to visit the Cincinnati area of which specimens⁴ are still alive is the black-capped petrel. Following a severe tropical hurricane in 1928 three of these birds winged their way up the Ohio Valley. One dropped exhausted at Augusta, Ky., on October 4, while the two others were found tired and weary near the Cincinnati Suspension Bridge on October 5...

The fate of the Augusta specimen is unknown. One of the birds found at Cincinnati was sent to the Zoological Gardens, while the other, a female, was made into a skin for the Natural History Museum, where it reposes to this day.

² Henry K. Coale must have been a dedicated collector; his 1915 survey in the *Auk* of extant specimens of the trumpeter swan is often cited.

³ The Field Museum's bird collections manager David Willard informed the author that neither the Museum nor the Chicago Academy of Science now possesses an Ohio or Kentucky specimen of *P. hesitata*.

⁴ In personal communication with the author, Maslowski stated that in the present day "individuals" might be clearer than "specimens" in this sentence.

A few days after their discovery, the petrel at the Zoo died since it refused all food that attendants proffered this tropical straggler. Apparently unaware of the rarity of this bird the petrel was thrown on a refuse heap. The late Mr. Charles Dury went to the Zoo the day following the bird's death and made inquiries about its condition. When he learned it had succumbed and had been thrown away he made haste to unearth the bedraggled bird.

Taking it to his taxidermist shop in Avondale he cleaned and skinned the specimen. Word soon spread that Mr. Dury had a fine skin of the rare black-capped petrel in his possession. It was not long until he received a letter from a wealthy gentleman in the East seeking to purchase the skin to be donated to a large museum. Mr. Dury sold it promptly for \$250.

We shall never know how many black-capped petrels were in the Cincinnati area during those days, but it is remarkable that three live birds were retrieved. Ironically enough, this record would probably never have been published had the first instinct of humans not been either to kill the birds or to capture them as something of value—even of remarkable value, as \$250 at the time would have paid for a 500-year subscription to *The Wilson Bulletin*. It was a common practice of the day for museums to pay collectors for specimens of birds, and even to issue want-lists of species desired with prices offered.

Another question is whether, at least based on the testimony above, the black-capped petrel really belongs on the Ohio list. Near the localities mentioned, the entire Ohio River—except where normally dry land on the Ohio side might have been flooded—would have been within the state of Kentucky.⁵ Lindahl's (1899a) contemporaneous testimony seems to describe two birds found on the Ohio River or over it and one on the bridge (though it is, one supposes in the absence of evidence to the contrary, possible it was found on the small portion of the bridge within Ohio's boundary), making them all Kentucky birds. This is how Mengel (1965), Monroe (1994), and Palmer-Ball (2003), authors treating the birds of Kentucky, regard them. If Kemsies and Randle had any firmer justification for their assertion that two birds were found on the Ohio side of the river, it has not been recorded, at least to our knowledge. The words they chose (see above) may indicate they mistakenly regarded the middle of the river, or perhaps even the Kentucky shore, as the border between Kentucky and Ohio.⁶

⁵ Per *Ohio v. Kentucky* No. 2, Orig. 444 U.S. 335 Argued 3 Dec 1979, Decided 21 Jan 1980 in the U.S. Supreme Court, the border is "the low-water mark on the northerly side of the Ohio River as it existed in 1792 when Kentucky was admitted to the Union, not the current low-water mark on the northerly side of the river..." A. Froehlich informs us this line is currently under water. Flow in the Ohio was first controlled by the Federal government with the completion of a lock and dam in 1885, five miles below Pittsburgh, and it is likely no dam in the Cincinnati area enlarged the river 13 years later.

⁶ This seems likely, at least in Lindahl's case, since his brief report for the Ohio Academy of Science (1899b) suggests he apparently regarded all three specimens as coming from Ohio: "Not less than three specimens of the rare Black-capped Petrel (*Estrelata hesitata*) were captured on the Ohio River last summer [*sic*], 1898, after a violent gale on the Atlantic coast. This is the first record of any specimen of this pelagic bird being found in the State of Ohio."



Specimen #CMC-B-27336 from the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, the only known black-capped petrel skin surviving of the three involved in the visitation of 1898. The oldest tag gives the collection location as "Ohio Riv. Cinti" and the date as 5 Oct 1898. Photo by Ned Keller.

The Petrels of 1996

There is reason to believe the exceptional set of occurrences that brought us these birds may not remain unique after all. Black-capped petrels have proved susceptible to being blown off course by intense and sustained onshore winds, especially in areas like North Carolina where the Gulf Stream flows relatively close to the mainland.⁷ This species figured prominently, for example, in the long list of pelagic species seen well inland during the hurricanes of 1996, in weather conditions that could well prevail again, and during which only increased and organized birder attention made many new records possible. In the aftermath of Hurricane *Bertha* in 1996, for example, from 12-17 July 37 black-capped petrels were recorded from shore in Virginia, and eight in New Jersey. Later that year, as a result of the more intense Hurricane *Fran*, eight were recorded onshore in Virginia, one or two in North Carolina, three in Pennsylvania, four in New York, and one in Maryland (Brinkley et al. 1997); in addition, 23 specimens and sight reports of 17 birds came from on or near Lake Erie and Lake Ontario (Curry 1996b). Other pelagic birds blown our way by *Fran* included at least four Wilson's storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* and several unidentified storm-petrels seen in Ontario near Niagara Falls (*ibid.*), and a black skimmer *Rhyncops niger* and a Cory's shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* in Pennsylvania (Brinkley et al. 1997).

⁷ An exception is the latest of Florida's two inland records of the species, a bird found in Lake County in the central part of the state 28 February 2001 following a period in which no easterly winds had been recorded; it died 2 March 2001 (Scales 2002).

So what did Ohio observers see during the memorable Great Lakes invasion of storm-driven oceanic birds in the fall of 1996? Not much. Birders along Lake Erie may have been energized by news of the birding possibilities the unusual weather presented, but no extraordinary Ohio reports ensued.

The eye of *Fran*, by then technically a tropical depression, entered Lake Erie over Conneaut about 1400 h on Saturday 7 September 1996. Winds from the north-northwest at Cleveland averaged 32 mph and peaked at 43 mph that day, the year's rainiest in Ohio, with 4.59 inches of precipitation and a barometric reading of 28.80 inches. Continuing northerly winds and low pressure over the ensuing 10 days made the month of September 1996 set the all-time state monthly record for rainfall with 11.05 inches.

Across the lake in Canada, birders were alert and organized, and nearly a hundred mounted lake watches over lakes Erie and Ontario in and near the storm's track beginning that weekend (Curry 1996a). On Sunday 8 September the first black-capped petrel was sighted on Lake Erie near Port Colborne, and later that afternoon three were seen off Fort Erie, across from Buffalo, New York. Curry (1996b) describes a strong depression that generated intense easterly winds the following week, with a petrel sighting on 17 September as far west as Point Pelee, just 35 miles north of Huron, Ohio. Nearly all these records came from the eastern end of Lake Erie, but speaking of this day and that to follow, Curry wondered "whether systematic searching at the extreme western end of Lake Erie in Michigan and Ohio on these days might have turned up some petrels."

During September 1996, reports came from the Ontario side of Lake Erie of 12 black-capped petrels seen and 16 found dead or injured, not to mention the storm-petrels mentioned above, reports of five living and two dead sooty terns *Sterna fuscata*, and two American oystercatchers *Haematopus palliatus* on 9 September near Port Colborne on Lake Erie (*ibid.*). It turned out to be a good fall for Ohio jaegers along Lake Erie, though many showed up after Hurricane *Fran* was only a memory. An observer reported seeing two oystercatchers off the Lake Erie shore in Ashtabula 14 September 1996, but the Records Committee did not accept the documentation, principally because such a first state record required more than a brief report of a single-observer sighting. All in all, one wonders if perhaps we missed a great opportunity to find some noteworthy new pelagic wanderers in Ohio, and by all accounts the black-capped petrel could have been among them, as it might be in years to come.

Acknowledgments

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Thomas Wetlands – Paulding County

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For those unfamiliar with the topography of Paulding County, its chief feature is doubtless its incredible flatness. What was once a heavily-forested swamp has been transformed into largely treeless, highly-drained farmland that provides little or no habitat for water birds apart from limited natural stream areas. Mudflats and shallow natural ponds simply do not exist today. It is from this void of habitat that has sprung the Thomas Wetlands, a veritable oasis welcoming migrant, water-loving species of birds among unrelenting fields of mud and spring wheat. Utilizing the Federal program known as Wetlands Reserve, several members of the Thomas family were able to obtain cost-sharing to build approximately 60 acres of wetlands and to receive payments over a number of years for their conservation efforts. The results have been dramatic.

The most remarkable aspect of this transformation is how quickly what was once marginally productive farmland has become such an attraction for wildlife. Since their completion in the summer of 2001, these four areas have brought new hope and joy to the shorebird-starved birders of this area. Where once killdeers and the occasional spotted sandpiper or yellowlegs might be seen in a shallow ditch or along the edge of a farm pond, now the spring migration brings the certainty of a dozen or more species of common shorebirds and the ever-present possibility of rarities, such as Wilson's and red-necked phalaropes, willets, or Hudsonian godwits, all of which were seen in 2002. The Wetlands' total species count of shorebirds stands at 21 at present, but this number will surely grow in years to come. In addition, these wetlands have served to attract good numbers of waterfowl, mostly in the spring. Among the 19 species of waterfowl, greater white-fronted and snow geese are the most worthy of mention, but the extended springtime presence of flocks of blue and green-winged teals, gadwalls, northern shovelers, and ruddy ducks shows the strong attraction the area has for these birds as well. In addition, the very existence of a marshy area in these flatlands has attracted numerous other species, among which are American coot, pied-billed grebe, sandhill crane, cliff swallow, and American pipit.

The Thomas Wetlands are located near the intersection of Township Road 61 and County Road 176, about two miles east of the village of Antwerp (DeLorme Atlas Page 34, C-2, where they are labeled as Harrman and Hopkins roads). There are several ponds along County Road 176 that have been great for shorebirds, but visibility is somewhat limited, and the heavy truck and automobile traffic make stopping along the road a hazard. Fortunately, a 5-acre pond located at the southwest corner of the intersection can be safely viewed from Road 61. About one-half mile farther south on Road 61, along the north side of South Creek, lies an 8-acre pond, which provides the best viewing of waterfowl. There is an area adjacent to