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## Thomas Wetlands – Paulding County

Doug Dunakin

16728 Road 275, Antwerp, OH 45813-9218

edson@bright.net

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

the creek where one might pull off the road for a better view of the pond, but permission should be obtained from the owner, who lives in the first house north of this pond.

These ponds and their adjacent habitat may not merit many visits from birders privileged to live near the Lake Erie marshes, but for those of us whose lands have largely lost their attraction to the marshland species, they offer new credibility to the saying, "If you build it, they will come."

*Information about the Wetlands Reserve Program can be had from The Natural Resources Conservation Service at the USDA or at <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/>>. -Ed. 🐦*



This gathering of divers was photographed at E. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County, by Gary Meszaros on 9 February 2003.

## The 2002-03 Christmas Bird Counts

**Ned Keller**

7899 Bridgetown Road, Cleves, OH 45002

keller@one.net

Sixty Christmas Count circles reported their results this year, the same number as last year. There was only one change: Mt. Gilead was back after a year's absence, but we did not hear from Athens. All but three of the circles also reported their results to National Audubon, which was the source of most of the data presented here. Clark County, Gypsum, and Hancock County (which counts the entire county, not the standard 15-mile circle) are reported only here. Data from the rest of the country and beyond, and from past counts, are available online at Audubon's web site, <<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>>.

In the past, we have designated sightings reports that included documentation. Because we no longer receive reports directly from most count circles, and because the documentation submitted to Audubon is not available online (at least, I couldn't find it!), that feature has been dropped. The data are reproduced here as received, with two exceptions: I have corrected what seemed like obvious errors (such as multiple Oregon juncos, with zero other dark-eyed), and I have undoubtedly introduced new errors while transcribing the data.

We saw a total of 148 species this year, plus an additional 4 during count weeks. This is back to a more ordinary number than last year's 152 species. Eighteen species were recorded from only a single count on count day: a great egret at Ohio River, 11 trumpeter swans at Ottawa NWR, a common eider at Mentor, a harlequin duck at Grand Rapids-Waterville, 3 white-winged scoters in Lakewood, an osprey in Hancock County, a broad-winged hawk at Portsmouth, 3 Virginia rails at Millersburg, a common moorhen in Columbus, 2 purple sandpipers at Lake Erie Islands, an American woodcock at Beaver Valley, 2 little gulls in Mentor, a Thayer's gull in Cleveland, a northern saw-whet owl at Killdeer Plains (with another count-week individual at Dayton), a rufous hummingbird at Wooster (with another count-week bird in Cincinnati!), a Swainson's thrush at Lakewood, a common yellowthroat at Millersburg, and a white-winged crossbill at Wellington. Obviously, sightings such as these are the ones for which documentation is most desirable. Inevitably, common species were missed occasionally: where were the American kestrels in Lakewood, the American crows at Grand Lake St. Marys, and the American robins at Oxbow Lake?

Cincinnati led the pack with the highest number of species reported, with 87. Not far behind were Millersburg with 85, Lake Erie Islands with 84, and Cuyahoga Falls and Toledo with 82. Cuyahoga Falls had the best turnout of field observers with 92 (plus an additional 45 feeder watchers), followed by Preble County with 84 and Cincinnati with 81. Mansfield and Parkersburg also turned out impressive numbers of feeder watchers, with 24 and 23, respectively.