

Further Afield

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Envision one Homer J. Simpson—eyes rolled back, slack-jawed, and drooling—in a delirious stupor of wonderment, all over a box of delicious doughnuts. Probably jelly doughnuts. Now exchange one Robert N. Harlan for Homer J. Simpson, and exchange a yellow rail for the box of delicious doughnuts, and you have a disturbingly realistic recreation of the scene at Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve this past May, when this aggravatingly elusive *rallidae* finally “tick-tick, tick-tick-ticked” its way onto my state list after many years of vain searches and wild rail chases. The sweet, sweet yellow rail was now mine, all mine. As of this writing, I remain insufferably pleased, and grateful also, if the truth must be known.

Finally tracking down a long-sought bird is a special moment; undoubtedly you’ve also experienced many of these sublime conquests over the years. Seldom are we able to make our own serendipitous discovery of a rare bird; it is much more commonplace to “refind” a rarity, that is, by following up on someone else’s discovery. The former method might be the most exhilarating and the most rewarding, but the latter method is usually much easier, less time-consuming, and, ultimately, counts just the same. In this spirit, I applaud veteran Toledo birder Tom Kemp for his discovery, correct identification (by sound alone), and willingness to share the yellow rail at Irwin this spring. Sharing of knowledge is truly one of the cornerstones of birding; it is a communal gesture, without which the entire recreational study and appreciation of birds might collapse. Such a collapse, if it were to actually happen, would be really bad. I’d like to avoid it.

This is precisely why I developed a series of columns to assist Ohio birders in finding rare Ohio birds. The first of these columns appeared in “Further Afield” in the Summer 2002 issue of *The Ohio Cardinal* [25(4):181-85]. In that issue, we covered red-throated loon, red-necked grebe, eared grebe, American white pelican, little blue heron, and yellow-crowned night-heron. Next, we moved on to the Summer 2003 issue [26(4):162-67], and discussed greater white-fronted goose, brant, Eurasian wigeon, harlequin duck, white-winged scoter, and long-tailed duck. Presumably you have found all of these by now.

Keep in mind, though, that these two earlier columns were written back in birding’s Dark Ages, when we all believed that Ohio’s (and North America’s) list of bird species should begin with loons and grebes. This belief was based on the fact that every birding-related encyclopedia, book, journal, magazine, computer program, web site, checklist, pamphlet, flyer, scribbled note, etc., that we had seen up to that point had all followed the same accepted

and elegant pattern, with loons and grebes coming first in line. But that was before birding’s so-called Enlightened Age, initiated in June 2003, when research accepted by the American Ornithologists’ Union informed us that we were chumps, and that we had it all wrong—actually, our lists should now begin with geese, swans, and ducks, and then grouse and the like, and *then* loons and grebes. How wrong we were. I feel dirty, and ashamed.

I should also acknowledge that apparently the AOU *never even once* considered that their reordering of the official list of North American birds might bollix up the ordering in my series on rare Ohio birds, which had, up to that point, been based on the pure and pristine old order, and which now must be reconsidered to conform to the demented and depraved new order. Although deeply offended by the AOU’s inconsiderate actions, in the spirit of cooperation and sharing I will continue my series, fully reflecting the new order. But I won’t like it. OK, I’ll stop whining now.

Hoping to keep some sense of continuity, you will recall that the species addressed in this series are those graphed only as “rare” in the *Ohio Bird Records Committee Checklist of the Birds of Ohio*. We will now use the May 2004 edition. As defined therein, a rare species “normally occurs annually, but with only a few records on average” in the state. A rare species has a reasonably well-established pattern of occurrence, but it is much less numerous than an “uncommon” species, which is likely to be stumbled upon sooner or later without too much effort, even by an AOU list reorganizer. They are likewise more numerous than a “casual” species, which isn’t expected to occur annually, but which at least has a semblance of a pattern of occurrence. Rare species are much more numerous than an “accidental” species, which have no business being here at all, if you ask me. In a nutshell, rare birds aren’t rare enough to appear on the Ohio Bird Records Committee’s official Review List, which requires some acceptable form of documentation to make it into the historical record, but they are rare enough to make your day a happy one. That being established, let’s begin with....

Northern Goshawk

They nest across Lake Erie in Ontario, in northern Michigan, and even on occasion in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, but northern goshawks are decidedly rare here in Ohio. Known here only as migrants, they might conceivably attempt to nest someday in a remote wooded section of eastern Ohio; we can dream, anyway. Goshawk populations are a complicated subject, so rather than attempt to delve into a study of this species’ cyclical southward irruptions, or into the tantalizingly large numbers tallied at eastern hawk watches (outside of Ohio, of course), let’s focus instead on recent Ohio reports, as depicted in the seasonal reports of the 10 most recent years of *The Ohio Cardinal*.

The first problem we encounter is the inherent difficulty in identifying this species. Although adults are fairly straightforward if seen

well, immatures are easily mistaken for other species, such as large Cooper's hawks and immature red-shouldered hawks. Size can be difficult to judge in the field, and lighting often plays tricks as well, leading the unwary into an understandable bout of wishful thinking from time to time. Variation within species only adds to the confusion. Without question, a solid plan of attack is to familiarize oneself with this species at northern and eastern hawk watches where goshawks occur regularly and at least fairly often; such sites include Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania, Whitefish Point and Lake Erie Metropark in Michigan, and Holiday Beach in Ontario. Once familiarity is gained elsewhere, and good field identification guides are consulted and absorbed, only then do potential goshawks become more confidently identified in Ohio.

In the past 10 years, covering roughly 100 goshawk sightings, slightly over half have been published without being specifically aged as adult or immature. Of those specifically aged, about 1.4 adults have been seen for every immature.

The northern goshawk is a hardy species, and occasionally one will spend the winter here in an accessible location, and be seen by many if enough effort is expended. But this is the exception, as winter reports are rather widely spaced in timing and location. It is true that a larger proportion of sightings have taken place along Lake Erie than might be expected by chance alone, but overall more are seen inland. On average, Ohio north of Columbus has a strong edge in winter reports, accounting for some 80% of recent sightings.

Your odds improve in spring as migrants appear, especially at lakefront hawk watches. Nearly 70% of recent spring sightings have come from along the Lake Erie shore; impressively, almost 70% of these come from the Lucas, Ottawa, and Erie Co. shorelines. Maumee Bay State Park, the Magee Marsh Wildlife Area hawk tower, and Kelleys Island are all good options. Almost half of recent inland reports have come from northeastern Ohio. The timing of spring migration ranges from mid-March through the first week of May, with sightings roughly evenly spaced within this period—with the exception, that is, of a strong spike (almost double the likelihood of other weeks) during the first week of April.

Fall migrants are decidedly harder to find than spring migrants, with recent spring reports more than doubling the number of fall reports. Again, the lakeshore produces more than its fair share of reports (about 30%), but inland Lucas Co., especially the Oak Openings and areas west of Toledo, have hoarded almost 50% of all recent fall reports, presumably southbound birds spilling around the western end of Lake Erie. Fall migrants begin to trickle through in late October, but seem to peak mainly in the second and third weeks of November, with just over 60% of fall sightings coming from this two-week period.

So, for an overall plan, first study this species where it is more numerous. Then, ideally a cooperative goshawk will decide to winter here at a single location, giving you more than one chance to pin it down. If no

wintering birds are present, spring migration is your best bet, especially during the first week of April along Lake Erie in Ottawa and Lucas counties; I'd try the Magee hawk tower or the big hill at Maumee Bay State Park. Fall hopes should be less fervent, but a few mid-November days spent scanning the skies over an expansive Oak Openings field (perhaps near the corner of Reed and Girdham Roads in Oak Openings Metropark) might just do the trick. In truth, the northern goshawk can be a very frustrating species in Ohio, especially for those not entirely confident of their identification skills. Confident birders, as well as birders blissfully unaware of the many identification pitfalls involved, tend to see more goshawks, for whatever reason.

Golden Eagle

Now here is a rare bird that has certainly established more of an Ohio presence in the past 10 years. Things are looking good for golden eagle searchers, as this species has now wintered every year in varying numbers (one to three birds per year) in the vast grasslands at and around The Wilds (Muskingum Co.), apparently since the winter of 1996/97. A good winter plan of attack at The Wilds is to drive all the roads slowly, looking skyward; intersperse this with frequent stops along the way to get out and scan. The area of the preserve's headquarters on International Road offers a suitable and often productive vantage to scan large chunks of sky. Both adults and immatures have been present in recent years. You may even see more than one eagle, but many birders have spent the entire day without seeing any. Some have found eagles on their first visit, while others haven't seen any over multiple visits—so plan for a long day, and preferably visit in good weather suitable for airborne raptors. Wintering goldens typically appear there by late November, and leave by mid-March. Even if no eagles are to be found, rough-legged hawks and short-eared owls should put on a good show here, and in the past two winters, a prairie falcon has outshone the goldens, which isn't easy.

Winter sightings from locations other than The Wilds are still quite rare, and are widely spread across the state. Late migrants probably account for most December reports at odd locations, although this species certainly could winter at other reclaimed grasslands in southern and eastern Ohio, such as Egypt Valley or Crown City Wildlife Areas; these sites receive little birder attention, but deserve much more.

As migrants, golden eagles are seen in roughly equal numbers in the spring and fall, but different eagle-finding strategies are required for the two seasons. In spring, migrants usually appear during the second week of March and continue through April to the first week of May. Keep in mind that sightings are always the exception rather than the rule. The peak of the spring movement seems to come during the middle two weeks of April, a period which accounts for over a third of all spring reports in the past 10 years. The shore of Lake Erie is the place to be in spring, knowing that almost three

quarters of all recent Ohio sightings have come from along the Lake as the birds move to the west or to the east along the shore, avoiding a long open water crossing. Lakefront observations seem to fall into two primary areas—the Ottawa/Lucas Co. area, which accounts for two thirds of all lakefront sightings, and the Lake/Ashtabula Co. area, which accounts for most of the other third. As is the case for northern goshawk, preferred sites in spring include the Magee Marsh hawk tower and the sledding hill at Maumee Bay State Park. Elsewhere in spring, at locations other than The Wilds, more recent goldens have been seen in Holmes County than anywhere else; the abundance of active and intrepid birders there probably has as much to do with this fact as do any other factors.

In the fall, you will also want to head to northern Ohio, as in the spring. But this season, head to the Toledo area, beyond the western end of Lake Erie. Fully two thirds of recent Ohio fall sightings (away from The Wilds, that is) emanate from the relatively small area including Toledo and points immediately west and south, with the Oak Openings area again being a local favorite. With such a large percentage of Ohio fall sightings coming from this sector, this clearly pinpoints the best area to search at this season, and since fully 90% of recent Ohio fall sightings have come between 16 October and 15 November, this is clearly the best time to make a search. The period between 24 October and 7 November is the best time of all, especially with cooperative weather conditions. Fall sightings elsewhere are very scattershot, other than in late November at The Wilds.

Given a decent look, the golden eagle should offer few identification worries, which is more than we can say for northern goshawk. Of those reports in which ages were provided, over 75% of goldens in Ohio are immatures (juveniles and subadults), which is to be expected given the preponderance of young over adults recorded at other northern and eastern hawk watches.

Overall plan—head to The Wilds of Muskingum County, and hope that wintering birds continue to appear there; or, head to the Lake Erie shore, preferably Magee Marsh or Maumee Bay State Park, between 8-23 April; or, head to the Oak Openings area west of Toledo between 24 October and 7 November. Sit down, look up, and wait. Bring binoculars.

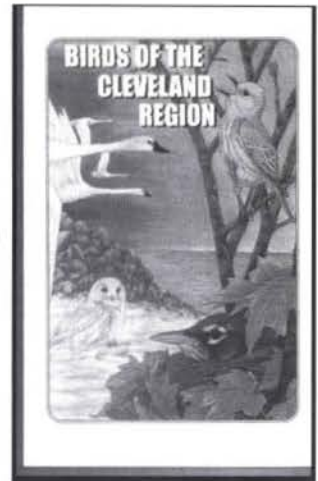
That will have to do it for this issue. To treat them adequately, northern goshawk and golden eagle have required more page space than expected, especially compared to the other species we've examined previously. But that seems only fitting for these two, which require more space in life as well. Considering the treatment they've received from humankind over the years, I think they've earned a little more space.

Book Review: *Birds of the Cleveland Region*

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Rosche, Larry, ed. 2004. *Birds of the Cleveland Region*. Kirtland Bird Club. Cleveland, OH. 187 + ix pp, illustrated. \$24.99.



Editor Larry Rosche's *Birds of the Cleveland Region* is described as the second edition of a work of the same name by Arthur B. Williams published in 1950 by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Williams's was the first authoritative and inclusive treatment of this avifauna. This new edition continues the tradition, taking account of records of birds recorded in the region since that time, as well as new species (both newly-observed and derived from taxonomic refinements) and new locales involved.

A respected authority among Ohio bird observers, Rosche edited the venerable *Cleveland Bird Calendar* for 16 years. He has studied this periodical's reports from the past 100+ years, and the result is a comprehensive and well-written portrait, much distilled and refined, of the region's bird life, updated to cover the period since Williams's work of more than half a century earlier. Williams used words alone to describe each species' status, habitats, and distribution, as well as local nesting information when appropriate. The species accounts in this edition add informative graphs depicting each species' seasonal status (nearly identical to those in Rosche's "A Field Book of Birds of the Cleveland Region" of 2004), and small outline maps showing accepted occurrences for each of the seven counties (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, and Summit) in the region herein defined. The area covered by Williams was smaller, comprising roughly everything within 30 miles of Cleveland's Public Square, with an extension to include Akron; from Public Square to the eastern border of the area as currently defined is, by contrast, about 45 miles. Documentary photographs, many themselves rare, of 60+ rarities, a guide to productive birding sites in the region, as well as charming bird portraits by Jennifer Brumfield and Kevin Metcalf, are among the many welcome features of this work.

Williams's accounts total 330 taxa (including 314 full species, 14 extra subspecies and two hybrid forms). Rosche's, covering a larger area and with 54 extra years of accumulated data, total 376, including three species