

## The Cowan Lake waterfowl study

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Cowan Lake is a 700-acre lake about seven miles southwest of Wilmington in Clinton County. The lake was formed in 1950 by damming Cowan Creek. It is the centerpiece of Cowan Lake State Park. The web site at <http://www.ohiodnr.com/parks/parks/cowanlk.htm> fully describes the location and facilities available. The DeLorme map reference is p.77 D5.

In the spring of 2005 I tried with some success to count the waterfowl on Cowan Lake every day that weather permitted. Cowan Lake is small enough that all the birds on the lake can be counted in six stops along the south shore, accessible from OH 350. Counting usually took about an hour and I tried to time my visits for the last hour before sunset. The waterfowl numbers given below are a summary of those counts.

Cowan's contribution to waterfowl migration was limited by the constraints of open water conditions during the early weeks and by human use when the weather warmed up. Before 15 Feb there was too much ice for the counts to be representative. On the other hand, waterfowl concentrations are very sensitive to human use of the lake. Waterfowl numbers nose-dived with even three or four boats on the lake. After 5 Apr, human traffic on the lake precluded use by more than a handful of waterfowl, and most of those were the Canada geese and mallards that breed there. Aggregating the numbers of waterfowl gives a partial picture of the main thrust of waterfowl migration. In Figure 1, aggregated numbers are plotted against a linear scale.

Plotting the data against a semilog scale, as in Figure 2, gives a better picture of usage. From this chart it is easy to see that during the period there were usually several hundred waterfowl on the lake on days that were conducive to taking data. Note that a zero on this chart indicates that no count was made on that date. From these charts, it is evident that two big pushes occurred, one between 8 Mar and 16 Mar and another between 23 Mar and 31 Mar.

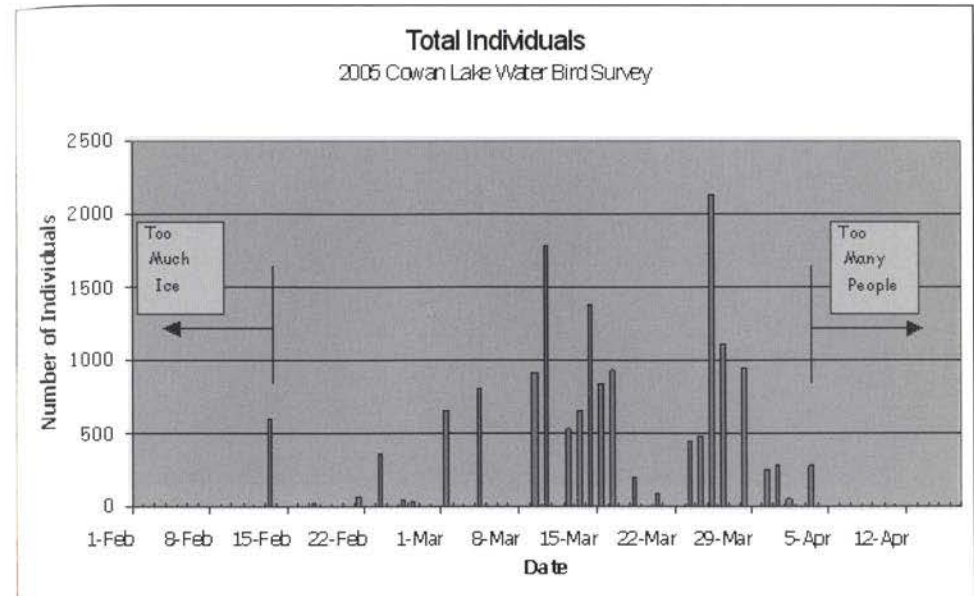


Figure 1

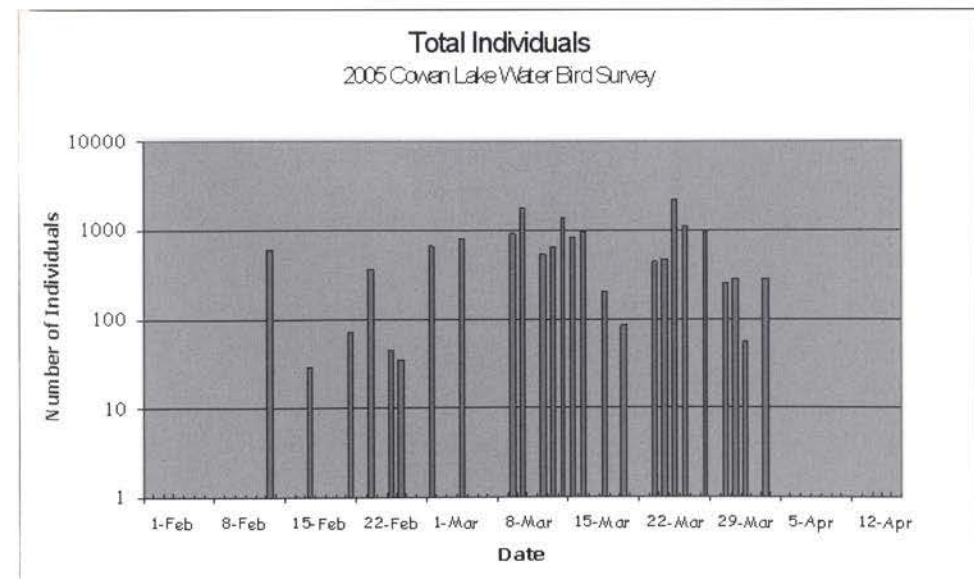


Figure 2

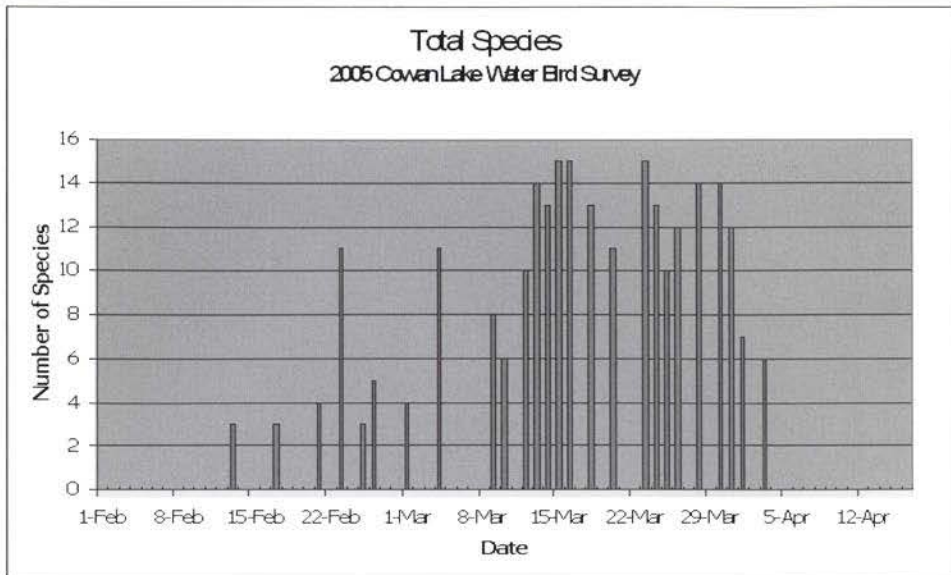


Figure 3

It is interesting to compare species diversity by date, as in the chart in Figure 3. Here it is apparent the big pushes in numbers coincide with big numbers of species. This indicates that the migration conclusions are not being driven simply by one or a few very numerous species. The correlation is evidence that good migration conditions are generally good for all the species of waterfowl.

I intend to repeat this study in the fall and probably for the next couple of years to see if there is consistency in this behavior. Perhaps there will eventually be room in this for some fancy statistics.

## Short Note: Possible Hybrid Warbler Back in Toledo

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Imagine a small bird in Toledo, Ohio, just 4 ½ inches long and weighing about 9 grams, flying hundreds or thousands of miles to its wintering grounds in Central or South America and returning to the very same location one year later. How in the world does it do it?

While many birds accomplish similar feats, the bird I am referring to is perhaps unique, one I reported on last year, and thought by many observers to be a northern parula x cerulean warbler hybrid. This bird returned to Wildwood Metropark in Toledo, Ohio on 8 May 2005 and is still present as of this writing (20 June).

While I am confident that this is the same bird as last year, it does look a little different this spring. It is singing slightly different songs, and I have observed a feeding behavior that I didn't notice last year.

My observations this year have, for the most part, been via views of the treetops, with one exception when the bird briefly flew within about 30 feet



Since there are no photos of this year's bird, here is one of last year's, taken 6 July by Brian Zwiebel.