

Short Note: Shorebird Migration at a Temporary Scrape

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During the late spring, summer, and early autumn of 2005 I tried to monitor migrating shorebirds using a temporary scrape that had filled with water at the earthworks at Armleder Park in Cincinnati.

Located about five miles east of downtown Cincinnati along Wooster Road to the northeast of the Beechmont levy, Armleder Park is one of the newest properties in the Hamilton County Park system. Bounded by the Little Miami River on one side, the 323 acres of this park are entirely within the floodplain of the river. I was first made aware of the potential of this property a few years ago when Stan Hedeem posted messages to the Cincinnati Birds web site regarding ducks in the flooded fields on the plain. I later met him one afternoon at an overlook at Ault Park and scoped ducks feeding in the fields of what would eventually become Armleder Park. After returning from a trip in the spring of 2005, I once again saw messages from Stan referring to this property. However, this time they referred to shorebirds, and the property now had public access. This definitely piqued my curiosity: shorebirds a few miles from downtown and just off my daily commute! Starting in mid-May I tried to stop by the park on my way to and from work to do a count of shorebirds. Some weekend visits were also made.

In recent times this property had been a soybean field. It is now a Hamilton County Park, although some areas are being jointly managed with Cincinnati Park Board and the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. Currently the park is under active construction. The result of this will be a mixed-use facility, with walking and biking trails, soccer fields, a multi-purpose field, a playground, and some buildings. A large portion of the park will be left a "naturalized" area, to be planted in native floodplain vegetation. Extensive earthwork is being conducted to install a drainage system and prepare the ground for the native plantings. Initially a scrape was made to facilitate drainage during the construction phase. I learned by talking to one of the main contractors on the site that this was not to be a permanent feature. Apparently there were fears that the standing water would attract waterfowl and interfere with flight patterns at nearby Lunken Airport. In my opinion the seven soccer fields pose more of a threat, as an attractant of resident Canada geese. This proved to be the case, based upon observations subsequent to the growth of the grasses planted for the fields. The scrape seemed to be the major attractant for migrating shorebirds. Occasionally they would flush from the area, such as when a plane flew over, but would often return a few minutes later.

The period of observation lasted from 17 May through 11 Oct, the day the scrape was filled. During this period I made a total of 92 visits and observed 93 migratory shorebirds of six species. Killdeers were not counted as migratory, although some may have been, as they were actively breeding at the site. There were no birds seen between 9 June and 19 July, so I am assuming that birds seen before 9 June were northbound and those after 19 July were

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southbound. Of the 93 birds seen, 58 were present during the northbound period and 35 during the southbound. The highest count for any single visit was ten birds. Table 1 shows the species seen along with the maximum seen during a visit, the total seen during the northbound and southbound periods and the total seen during the entire period of observation.

Species	Maximum Visit Count	Total During Northbound Period	Total During Southbound Period	Total During Entire Period of Observation
Semipalmated plover	3	3	0	3
Spotted sandpiper	3	8	2	10
Solitary sandpiper	1	1	9	10
Least sandpiper	7	24	23	47
Semipalmated sandpiper	7	22	0	22
Baird's sandpiper	1	0	1	1

Table 1

I am certain if I had been able to visit more frequently my count would have been higher and the diversity most likely would have been greater. This park property has a lot of potential beyond the temporary scrape that I have documented above. Stan Hedeem, for example, had reported seeing pectoral sandpiper, lesser yellowlegs, and Wilson's snipe on 5 May. Beyond shorebirds, I have also observed many other interesting species during my visits. These include but are not limited to the following: peregrine falcon, horned lark, American pipit, grasshopper sparrow, Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, savannah sparrow, blue grosbeak, dickcissel, eastern meadowlark, and bobolink. The contractor with whom I talked on numerous visits also described birds that best matched great and cattle egrets and ospreys. The interesting finds extend beyond the avian world. I have seen up to five bronze copper butterflies during a visit; both male and females were observed, indicating there may be a local breeding colony. In early August I photographed an aquatic plant that had grown up in the scrape. I recently learned from Jim McCormac's account of the shorebird symposium on the Ohio Ornithological Society's website that this plant is southern wapato *Sagittaria calycina*, which he describes as being quite rare in Ohio.

Although the total number of birds may not be high compared to some of Ohio's shorebird hotspots, the brief study shows the potential for such a site only a few miles from a major downtown area. It certainly provided me with the opportunity to observe a number of individual shorebirds in various plumage states, often at very close range. I have photographed many of the species, shorebirds and others, that I have seen in the park. These may be viewed on my website. If you are interested please visit <http://www.mangoverde.com/wbg/> and enter "Armleder" in the search box. This will return a list of species of which there are photos taken in the park. The scrape may be gone but I have continued to visit the park and it looks like it may have shorebird potential again next year. Although a drainage system has been put in, there are still many areas that are collecting shallow pools of water.