

They never like mine. About April 20, both orioles should arrive, along with various varieties of warblers and vireos, the catbird, and the wood thrush.

*And now the peak is reached.* A careful observer, Professor Conger places the peak between April 25<sup>th</sup> and May 5<sup>th</sup>. This seems a bit early to me—being a northern Ohio boy, I expect the zenith of migration about May 7-20. Regardless, by late April the dam is bursting, and we should be on the lookout for whip-poor-will, sundry flycatchers, rose-breasted grosbeak, and seven more warblers. The scarlet tanager *awakens our admiration*, and the bobolink arrives in our meadows, *bursting with song*. Look also for the olive-backed [Swainson's] thrush, and its russet companion, the Wilson's thrush [veery]. The *feathered monologist*, the red-eyed vireo, also unceasingly announces its newly established presence from selected wooded retreats, especially in the far south.

### May

*Did you bid our feathered winter visitors goodbye, or did they steal away without your noticing their departure? While we may miss them on future trips, their places are now taken by so many new arrivals that we shall be too busy to mourn their going.*

Call me callous, but I do not believe I have ever mourned the northward departure of an American tree sparrow. But Professor Conger still has a valid point—in our record-keeping efforts, we often tend to focus more on arrival dates than on departure dates. Thus, while we can generally predict within a few days when most species will arrive here (whether in spring or fall), we tend to be a bit murkier when someone asks us to report our *last date* for singing yellow warblers, or for wintering snow buntings, or the like. Consider this a call for more thorough record-keeping.

But back to May 1928. During the first ten days of May, Professor Conger urges us to watch for the nasal nighthawk, the plaintive pewee, and meadowlark-like dickcissel. Even better, 11 more species of warblers are expected, *and this means real work and puzzled brains for bird students*. Among them are the magnolia, golden-winged, and parula, the sky-blue caerulean, and the necklaced Canadian. *We must not miss the Blackburnian*, but our best efforts may fail to get a glimpse of the clownish chat, *which has come to mock us from his tangled thicket lair...He is at once the delight and the despair of the bird student who would study him at close range*. More manifest are the chestnut-sided and bay-breasted warblers, *which bear such fitting titles that a good clear view identifies them without resort to bird book or guide*. Perhaps this was the case in Professor Conger's day, but oddly, today one may frequently witness Magee Marsh boardwalk birders confound the two. Fortunately, I keep a detailed logbook of all such occurrences, so watch out.

As May continues, *[t]he roll of birds is almost complete*. We can expect to add the two rain-crows [cuckoos], the alder [now both willow and alder] flycatcher, and two tardy warblers, the mourning and the blackpoll. It's been a good ride.

Here, with the impending arrival of summer, Professor Conger draws the curtain on spring migration, dissolving instead into nesting-season studies. We'll take this opportunity to fade out also, and plan to catch up with the Professor again soon, somewhere down the trail. He seems like a friendly enough sort; I don't think he'd mind.

## Grand Lake Saint Marys: Introducing Some Fragments of its Ornithological History

by Bill Whan

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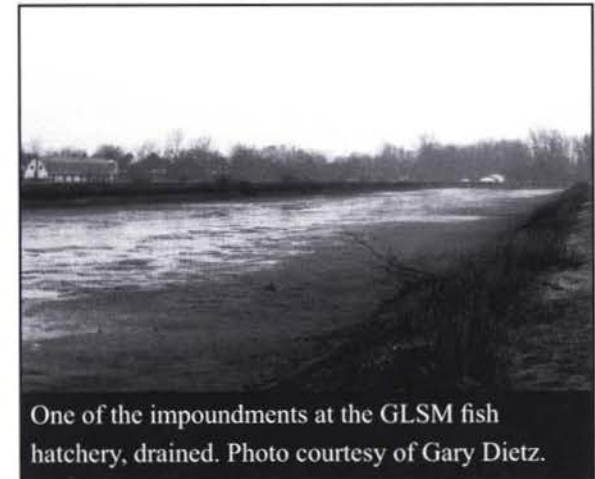
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Ohio is not blessed with many natural lakes. Nearly all we possess are remnants of melting glaciers. Next to Lake Erie, Medina County's Chippewa Lake—at 385 acres—is the largest. Counting its many artificial bodies of water, Ohio has over 50,000 lakes and ponds, but only 33 of them make the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's list of natural ones, for which an important criterion is support of native lacustrine vegetation.

During the past hundred years large artificial lakes in Ohio have usually been constructed for purposes of recreation or municipal water supply or both. During the nineteenth century, however, the most important water projects were designed to advance commerce in Ohio by means of two canal systems:

the Ohio-Erie in the east, and the Miami-Erie in the west. These networks, including their spur lines, passed through 44 of Ohio's 88 counties, extending over 1000 miles. Their construction began by 1825, and by 1855 canal traffic reached its peak. Facing competition from railroads, the canal system declined rapidly soon thereafter. The severe flooding of 1913 erased many aqueducts, locks, and other facilities, reducing Ohio's canals to historical traces.

The most substantial remnants of this once-proud accomplishment are the reservoirs, originally constructed to act as reliable sources of water for the canals. The principal reservoir for the Ohio-Erie Canal was the Licking Reservoir (now Buckeye Lake); a 1902 account by Lynds Jones of the bird life of this body of water may be found in the *Ohio Cardinal* 28(2). The Miami-Erie Canal's most significant, the Grand Reservoir (now Grand Lake Saint Marys in Mercer/Auglaize counties), will be treated below through historical accounts of approximately the same vintage. The Grand Reservoir was not a wholly artificial imposition on the landscape. Economy required its construction on low-lying



One of the impoundments at the GLSM fish hatchery, drained. Photo courtesy of Gary Dietz.

terrain, so a primeval wetland site was chosen, with margins that featured intermediate habitats like wet forests, seasonally flooded areas, feeder creeks, etc. Two much smaller subsidiary reservoirs were constructed soon thereafter: Loramie in Shelby County and Lewiston in Logan County, which persist to this day as Lake Loramie and Indian Lake.

Grand Lake St. Marys is Ohio's largest inland body of water, and at the time of its construction (1837-1845) was the world's largest artificial lake. It is said it remains the largest such lake in the world constructed without the aid of machinery. German and Irish laborers moved soil with wheelbarrows to dike the area between two existing eight-mile-long east/west ridges on the north and south, and legend has it they were paid 30 cents and a jigger of whiskey a day. Local residents who resented the consequent loss of farmland breached the dike in 1843; similarly motivated crimes occurred at other Ohio reservoirs during the era. Like Buckeye Lake's, GLSM's site was chosen because of its previous condition as a natural wetland (described by Gordon [1969] as a wet prairie grassland with an elm-ash swamp forest at the western end near Celina), called Beaver Prairie, and its location along an optimal 249-mile route from Toledo to Cincinnati that involved in early times only six miles of portage at high water, and 26 miles at low water.

The size of the reservoir varied of course over time, but was measured at over 17,000 acres (about 13,000 acres today), and between 8 and 9 miles long and between 1.5 and 3 miles wide. GLSM has an unusual split watershed: its western end drains via the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico, and the eastern end into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River. The reservoir was quite shallow, with an average depth of 5-7 feet, and not long after construction came to be largely surrounded with marshy land. This was excellent waterbird habitat: In 1878, Langdon quoted a communication from Dury, describing the cormorant colony on the site:

*On the south side of the Reservoir, about seven miles from Celina, was the 'Water Turkey' Rookery. Here I used to go to shoot them, with the natives who wanted them for their feathers; I have helped to kill a boat-load... One season I climbed up to their nests and got a cap full of eggs. The nests were made of sticks and built in the forks of the branches. The trees [which were dead] were mostly oaks, and covered with excrement. I found from two to four eggs or young to a nest. The young were queer creatures—looked and felt like india rubber... The old birds flew around in clouds, and made their croaking notes, indicative of their displeasure at my presence... Some of the trees had ten or twelve nests on them... As the timber has rotted and blown down, the birds have become less and less numerous.*

Langdon goes on to say: "The above circumstances occurred during the month of June, 1867, since when, as Mr. Dury states, these birds have rapidly decreased in numbers. The many specimens examined by him were, without exception, var. *floridanus*. My own observation of the species in Ohio is limited to a single specimen found floating in the Reservoir late in October, 1874, when its comrades had probably migrated. It has been tolerably well identified on both Miamis during the migrations." The apparent abundance reported of this species in Dury's account is of some interest in view of current attempts to reduce its numbers in the region.

Eventually, a substantial fishing industry developed in the reservoir, based on the marsh nursery. In 1888, oil from the Lima field was discovered on the site, and first offshore oil-rigs in the US were constructed to harvest it. Hundreds of these, along with other resource-extraction activities, especially felling of forests that prior to 1900 covered 75% of the surrounding land, led to the deterioration of the natural qualities of the site. Carp were introduced into the lake. In 1913 a 160-acre fish hatchery was established on the eastern end of the reservoir, and remains today. The hatchery was once a superior birding spot, attracting many shorebirds in migration, along with some rare larids. Adjacent marshlands were productive of bitterns, rails, etc. until recent decades, when a general decline of native aquatic vegetation advanced, said to have been caused in part by more extensive mowing of impoundment margins. Clark and Sipe (1970) give another good look at these habitats and others. The hatchery is still of occasional interest when managed water levels attract migrant shorebirds.

Nearby Grand Lake St. Marys State Park provides limited lakeside wooded habitat, beaches, and views of the Lake itself. Mercer Wildlife Area, in the southwest corner of the reservoir, devotes much of its 1408 acres to waterfowl management for hunting. This was an important site for the introduction of *maxima* Canada geese beginning in the 1950s. Access for birders is limited. In the extreme northwestern corner of the lake, gulls, terns, and shorebirds may be found along a rocky breakwall, most often when no one is fishing at the site. Otherwise, the lake has grown less attractive to birds as human uses for agriculture, habitation, and recreation have increased. Grand Lake St. Marys is not the rich birding spot it once was, but it has probably suffered too much in our estimation as this decline has kept observers away, in turn further reducing reports and consequently its reputation for attracting interesting birds.

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View of wetlands at Mercer Wildlife Area on Grand Lake St. Marys. Photo courtesy of Gary Dietz.

## Contributions to the Ecology of St. Lake Marys, Ohio

by Charles Dury

*Charles Dury, renowned among the Cincinnati area's naturalists, delivered this text as a talk to the American Association for the Advancement of Science at its Cincinnati meeting in 1930. Dury, then 83, was president of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History. It appeared in the Proceedings of the Junior Society of Natural History 1930. 1(10-11):3-12, as "Contributions to the Ecology of St. Lake Marys, Ohio" [sic]. Dury's most important work concerned birds, as well as insects, particularly the Coleoptera. The most recent reference to him in these pages involved his rescue of one corpse of the Cincinnati black-capped petrels of 1898. —Ed.*

Previous to 1837, this artificial lake did not exist. The land was black mucky soil, partly covered with large oak trees. There were no fishes, no waterfowl—nothing.

It is located partly in Auglaize and partly in Mercer County, Ohio, in the west central part of the State. The highest land or summit of Ohio is in the form of a low elevation that begins in the northeast corner and crosses the State, passing through these counties. It is on this summit that Lake St. Mary's is situated. Approximately the southern two-thirds of Ohio drains into the Great Lakes, and thence, through Niagara and the St. Lawrence, into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Lake St. Mary's or St. Mary's Reservoir, as it was called at the time of completion, was then the largest artificial body of water in the world. It was constructed as a feeder to supply water to the Miami Canal. It was commenced in 1837 and was completed in 1854. The contour of the land, flooded from east to west, was a shallow valley. By building an embankment four miles long across the west end, and one two miles long across the east end, the lake was formed. When filled with water, it made a lake 9 miles long by from two to four miles wide, and contained about 17,000 acres, and when full, averaged 10 feet deep. The flooded land was one-half prairie, and the remainder heavy timber, mostly oak. When the water was introduced the trees died, but remained standing for many years. The smaller branches were soon broken off and fell into the water. The waste or spill-way is at the southwest corner and the water flows into the old Beaver Channel and thence into the Wabash River, finally reaching the Gulf of Mexico. The water that feeds the canal flows into the feeder through the Bulkhead, which is located at the south-east corner, and enabled the Canal to carry its traffic, very considerable at that time. The Ohio Legislature originally appropriated \$20,000 to pay for the land and to cut out the timber, but the money was squandered by officials and land speculators. Situated as it is, directly in the pathway of the flight of waterfowl in their spring and fall migrations from their winter homes in the South, to their breeding homes in the North, this fine body of water has an irresistible attraction as a resting and feeding place for countless myriads of aquatic birds of the many species whose range includes Ohio, and created a safe breeding place for a number of species. On my first visit to this sportsman's paradise, in 1867, I was amazed at the seemingly endless swarms of Geese, Cormorants, Ducks, Gulls, Terns, Herons, Coots, and other aquatic birds, that filled the air in flight, rested on the water or perched on the standing dead trees. The south side, with shallow, marshy shores, densely overgrown with aquatic plants, was an ideal breeding place for Ducks, Gallinules, Coots, Rails, Swamp Blackbirds, Marsh Wrens and other species. The shallow water along the shores of the south side were soon densely overgrown with Willows, called "Black Brush", and many other species of plants adapted to such an environment. In these protected waters, fishes