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The Ohio Cardinal is a quarterly publication devoted to the study and appreciation of Ohio's birdlife.

On the cover:

Summer Tanager is a common member of Ohio's bird fauna, and this spring included several overflows to northern Ohio beyond their normal haunts in the state. This male was photographed by Robert Rayse at Zaleski State Forest on 04 May 2008.

Spring 2008 Overview

By Gabe Leidy

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There is no such thing as a *typical* season, and if there were, these season reports would serve little purpose. It is the unpredictability as much as the predictability that makes birding such an entertaining and rewarding hobby. Spring 2008 served up a bit of both, being lackluster in some respects but phenomenal in others. For example, warbler migration was not characterized by impressive waves of arriving migrants, but waterfowl numbers set new records.

This March was a blustery one, with 18 days' highs not registering over 37 degrees in Cleveland. Overall the month was 3.5 degrees colder than usual in that city, with similar trends in the other major cities around the state. This left Lake Erie mostly ice-covered during March and into early April in some parts, bringing together immense numbers of bay ducks and waterfowl wherever open water was to be found. April had near average temperatures around the state, with just four snow days in the northern portion of the state (the last was on 14 April). Warm southerly breezes throughout the night accompanied the largest movements, most notably on 17 and 26 April. Below average precipitation during April was followed by May showers this year,

giving us what may have been the gloomiest May in recent memory. Weather records show rain on 20 days in Cleveland, including a memorable 12-day streak 07 to 18 May, and 16 days in the Toledo area. The first fully sunny day of the month in Columbus was 23 May, and the sun shone all day a total of five times in the northeast. Showers are eagerly anticipated during spring migration, because they have the ability to ground tremendous numbers of birds and cause fallout conditions. Few nights this year presented ideal migratory conditions, so many warblers and other migrant landbirds ended up trickling through the state. Perhaps the strongest flight this season came 26 May, when skies cleared, southerly winds billowed, and Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) banders at Navarre Marsh in northwest Ohio banded their highest total of the season.

Twelve review species were reported this season. Many, such as Glossy Ibis, White-faced Ibis, and Mississippi Kite, we have come to expect in recent years. Perhaps the most exciting rarities came from Buck Creek State Park in Clark County, where Brown Pelican and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (photographed), were spotted two days apart, though neither proved to be trackable. Ohio Bird Records Committee (OBRC) decisions on all review species are forthcoming.

The March waterbird passage was phenomenal compared with recent years, especially for diving duck species. The following high counts tell the story quite nicely:

16 Mar, 5,100 Redhead at Metzger Marsh; 17 Mar, 8,297 scaup off Kelleys' Island, 1,117 of which were Greater; and 09 Apr, at least 16,000 Red-breasted Mergansers from Lake County. Geese (other than the expected Canada Goose) were around in above average numbers during March, with many Greater White-fronted Geese reported further south, while thousands of Tundra Swans paused to rest in the northern part of the state. Among our longest-legged waders, Snowy Egrets were scarce in the northwest this spring, and birders were instead focused on a White-faced Ibis, multiple Glossy Ibises, and a Tricolored Heron.

Amish birders once again reported spectacular hawk flights from Conneaut on favorable days, furthering the notion that the eastern shoreline may hold more potential than the Western Basin for such movements. This was especially true for Broad-winged Hawk; BSBO recorded 473 Broad-wings for the season, while one-day totals at Conneaut exceeded this count three times, including 918 seen on 21 Apr. On the flip side, BSBO counters tallied a record 255 Bald and four Golden eagles this year, numbers with which Conneaut cannot compete.

Shorebird reports were highlighted by some above average numbers this year. Reports of shorebirds using unusually good habitat came in from ONWR, Big Island, and Funk Bottoms wildlife areas, Lorain Impoundment, Hardin County

wetlands, Ellis Lake, and Bellevue. The latter two were "skyponds," with those in Bellevue, Sandusky County, being caused by the flooding of underground caves and caverns that lie in the limestone beneath the surface of the town. The temporary lakes that sprang up in cornfields and front yards around the area, and the number of waterfowl and shorebirds using them, gave the whole region the feel of the prairie potholes of the Great Plains. Abundant habitat within the state led to sightings of rare spring migrants including Black-necked Stilt (4), Marbled Godwit, Western Sandpiper, and Stilt Sandpiper, along with unprecedented numbers of Wilson's Phalaropes and a new state record count of Willets from Lake Logan beach in Hocking County. Overall numbers of gulls and terns were average, though with more Lesser Black-backed Gulls reported inland than along the lake, and with Iceland and Glaucous gull reports also coming from reservoirs far south of Lake Erie.

Four individual Eurasian Collared-Doves were reported, including a copulating pair. Migrant Long-eared and Short-eared owls were present in above average numbers in April in northeast Ohio. Common Nighthawks were once again reported in low numbers, and no large concentrations of any sort were mentioned. A pair of Common Ravens decided that Ohio was a suitable place to raise a family, and the first nesting in over 100 years took place in Jefferson County.

Red-breasted Nuthatches were commonplace at feeders all around the state.

Early migrant warblers (typically those that breed in Ohio) arrived on schedule, but later migrants (typically those breeding north of Ohio) arrived later than expected due to unseasonably late prevailing north winds, cooler temperatures, and excessive precipitation. Breaks in this weather produced some nice flights, such as on 26 Apr, when many migrant landbirds made their first appearances around the state, and again on 26 May, when many of the latest warblers and flycatchers finally moved north in numbers. Songbird migration was delayed about a week in most areas. Birders at Magee Marsh in northwest Ohio in the second week of May found themselves still searching through hordes of Yellow-rumps for other species, instead of sifting through Magnolias, Chestnut-sideds, Redstarts, and other warbler species.

Lark Sparrows continue to be reported from new areas now that the birding population has realized this species' affinity for abandoned gravel pits. Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings were reported in healthy numbers from the interior, but no movements were noted along the lake. In the grasslands, few Dicksissels were noted, plenty of Blue Grosbeaks were around, and two singing male Western Meadowlarks were discovered in Wood County. Redpolls and Pine Siskins carried over from the winter season in higher than average

numbers, with some lingering quite late.

Though not a bird sighting, another highlight from the spring season was the news that Crane Creek State Park's management will be transferred from Ohio State Parks to Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODOW). Under ODOW, the beach area will be closed to swimming and picnicking, and some of the area will be allowed to revert to natural habitat, providing even better birding potential for this gem of a birding spot.