

BIRDING WITH MY BOY

By Andrew Pegman

My son, Andrew, was only two weeks old when he had his first birding experience. On New Year's Day, 2015, I poured myself a hot cup of coffee and put my son on my lap as we started our first birding adventure together on that cold Ohio morning.

I pointed out juncos, woodpeckers, cardinals, chickadees, nuthatches and a few other feathered, cold-weather companions as he slept quietly in my arms. The hearty little birds were regular winter visitors to our feeders and suet blocks, but we saw them all through the glass of our warm living room.

This past weekend, I had the pleasure of taking my now eight-month-old son to the North Chagrin Reservation [*Cuyahoga*] for an outdoor birding excursion. As we strolled around Sanctuary Marsh together, we felt the warm early morning August sunshine on our faces as we spotted finches, ducks, herons, swallows, thrushes, and geese.

The vibrant and lush sights of nature left my son wide-eyed, seemingly in awe of the intense color and spectacle of the natural world around us. He rode along in his stroller, making soft noises and looking up at the bright sky and across the shimmering water.

I don't know if my son will love nature as much as my wife and I do, but it is important to us that he experiences the world that exists outside of screens, and I don't mean window screens. He and I hiked the same path that I hiked with my father and grandfather. I saw my twelve-year-old self, crouched low by the edge of the water, trying to get a better look at a majestic Great Blue Heron.

As I walked along with my son, I thought about the mornings that he and I could spend spotting birds and returning home with our socks soaked with morning dew and big smiles on our faces. The best days of my youth and the fondest memories of my childhood all occurred outdoors. It served as the stage for a great many childhood adventures, and although no photographs exist, those days are painted in my memory as idyllically as though they were drawn by Norman Rockwell.

Like most parents, I wonder what the future will hold for my son and the generation of children that grows up with him. I am thankful that I grew up in a time before cell phones and social

media stole so much of our precious free time and attention.

After walking a few more laps lost in nostalgia, my mind turned back to what I had been missing. Instinctively, I pulled my smartphone out of my pocket and turned it off. Then I looked up at the blue sky and then down at my son. At that moment, a tiny goldfinch alit right in front of us, its bold, bright plumage striking, and I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude. I knelt down next to my son and held his small hand, so we could look at it together.

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