

The Big Day
1985

A big day in Ohio this Spring--impossible. There were hardly any passerine migrants much less "wave days."

Now knowing the unlikelyhood of a good day this Spring, what are the odds of a big day that bests the Ohio record of 179 species? But it happened, as told below by John Pogacnik, chronicler for the "Pogacnik group."

Other famous groups of Springs past: the Kemp and Bartlett groups, each a previous record holder, failed to mobilize, but wait until 1986 when each is assured to attempt to regain their former crown from this upstart recordholder.

Big days received official recognition in 1971 when they were sanctioned by the American Birding Association. Sanctioned because the ABA published rules to standardize the event nationwide (and now worldwide). The object is for a team of observers to see as many species in one day as possible. Not too scientific perhaps but challenging and lots of fun. The birds may be seen, or heard, and most, to conserve time, must be heard. The count can be held during any single 24-hour period during the year but must be on a single calendar day. In fact, most Ohio counts must be timed to occur during a peak May migration day to insure a high count. The participants must remain within direct voice contact of each other during all travel and must travel in the same vehicle if motorized. There must be two or more participants on each count to qualify for a record and the total number of species recorded must have been recorded by at least 95% of the participants. The results are published each year in the ABA journal: Birding. Records are kept for geographical areas (basically states) on a monthly and yearly basis.

The previous Ohio record was 179 species seen May 9, 1981, by Tom Bartlett, Bruce Peterjohn, Don Tumblin and Ed Pierce, as reported in The Ohio Cardinal, Vol. 4, No. 1.

Kirk Alexander, Matt Anderson,
John Pogacnik
May 10, 1985 186 Species

In all truthfulness, our big day really began over one month ago. That is about the time we began scouting and preparing our route. The actual day began shortly after midnight when we owled until 12:45 A.M. It was then that we turned up our first species, a barn owl, in the Long Beach area of Ottawa County. We then went to sleep only to wake up at 3:00 A.M., when we began our birding odyssey that would end 420 miles away at 11:30 P.M., in Adams County.

At 3:00 A.M., we began in Ottawa County by searching for rails and owls. Our first stop was the road by the Paradise Acres Campground. We were fairly successful: picking up the Virginia and Sora rails and a screech owl. Matt, during this time, was trying to gross us out by chugging cartons of yogurt but that didn't bother us because we were on a roll. Our next stop, at Little Portage Wildlife Area quickly ended that:

we missed both bitterns and king rail. Then on to Toussaint Wildlife Area and the entrance to Crane Creek where we again got skunked on those species. We were a little disappointed so we decided to move on to Maumee Bay State Park/Little Cedar Point National Wildlife Area. That brought our hopes back up as we picked up American Bittern, numerous ducks, and shorebirds including a willet.

At Maumee Bay Campground, we added several more species including the now annual western meadowlark. Checking our clock, we saw it was 7:00 A.M. and Bayshore power plant was now open. We went in and quickly picked up a laughing gull and a couple additional ducks but missed great black-backed gull, Bonaparte's gull and Caspian tern, all birds that are typically easy to see in this area. We never would get any of those species.

We then headed to Crane Creek around 8:00 A.M. Our goal was 70 species, we had 96. On our way to Crane Creek, our only stop was at Krause Road. What we hoped to pick up was not a bird but a dog. A dog nicknamed the "Yak" since it looks like a cross between a shrub and a dog. It had become sort of a birding good-luck charm for us. It is difficult to come by most days.

At Crane Creek, we added new birds rapidly. By 8:45 A.M., we had 130 species. It was kind of fun telling people who knew we were doing a big day that at 9:00 in the morning we had already seen 130. With everyone wishing us luck, we headed to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. It was almost a waste of time. We did pick up a red-shouldered hawk but we missed the cattle and snowy egrets, birds almost impossible to come by after leaving the marsh area. We then checked the many flooded fields south of Route 2. Here we picked up many new shorebirds, including a lifer for Matt: the curlew sandpiper.

With a hearty lunch of a couple of candy bars and pop, we headed east on Route 2. Sand Beach produced black terns. A flooded field near Paradise Acres added a mute swan. Our next stop was East Harbor State Park for a cormorant. We got it and also a small group of Forster's terns. We crossed Sandusky Bay and checked Medusa Marsh, knowing this would be our last look at the Lake Erie Marshes. Stopping at Castalia, we added the ring-necked duck and then on to Resthaven Wildlife Area for the elusive black-capped chickadee. We drove the roads there for 45 minutes adding nothing. It was then 2:30 in the afternoon and we were one hour behind schedule so we headed south.

We checked Raccoon Creek and Beaver Creek Reservoirs adding only bank swallow. Our next stop was Killdeer Plains where the long-eared owl, upland sandpiper, common loon were added. In Columbus we saw the yellow-crowned night heron and also added a tufted titmouse and white-breasted nuthatch, our only ones for the day. On to southern Ohio. We had about 160 species, about 2½ hours of light and things looked bleak.

For the southern part of the trip we put Kirk in charge and for a while we wondered if that was a wise move. After driving along rivers for 100 miles we never did pick up the kingfisher that he assured us would be "just up the road." Then we hit an area he knew had a mockingbird, only to get skunked again. We were beginning to feel like the record was out of our reach. Kirk assured us Sciota Trail State Park would be our turning point. As we were cruising the roads at about 40-45 mph, I announced I heard a blue-winged warbler, so Matt stopped and backed up. Within ten minutes, we added a dozen new species. Every stop seemed to add a couple

of more. At one location, we stopped for a golden-winged warbler and Matt asked for our total. I told him about 178-179. We decided since we were so close to the record that I should total our list. To our surprise, we had broken the record as our last bird, the eastern peewee, was 180. We then decided to check under bridges for the eastern phoebe. At the first bridge, I went under one side and Matt went around the other. Matt was almost hit by the bird which made 181. Light was failing fast so we checked an area Kirk said had pine warblers. We listened and all we could come up with were numerous chipping sparrows, but at last the pine warbler (182). We also added the whip-poor-will (183).

We knew our daytime birding was over so we headed into Waverly for our first real meal of the day. It was between 9:30 and 10:00 P.M., when we heard the common nighthawk (184) and then headed for Adams County. We were so tired that none of us really remembers the drive from Waverly. We headed to Ohio Brushcreek, where we quickly added Chuck-Will's-Widow (185) and what would be our final species, the barred owl (186).

It was 11:00 P.M. and we had an hour left. Being the idiots we were, we continued birding hoping to add a night-time singing mockingbird or a Henslow's sparrow but with no luck by 11:30, we called it a day. We got a motel room and passed out knowing we had the record.

The most interesting thing about our day was some of the easy birds we missed. We feel 200 - 210 is possible in Ohio. We hope the easy birds we missed will encourage others to try next year to beat our total. We'll be out there because we had a great time doing it!

The complete list of species seen or heard is listed below:
common loon, pied-billed grebe, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, green-backed heron, great egret, black-crown night-heron, yellow-crowned night-heron, American bittern, mute swan, tundra swan, Canada goose, mallard, American black duck, gadwall, northern pintail, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, American wigeon, northern shoveler, wood duck, redhead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, ruddy duck, hooded merganser, red-breasted merganser, turkey vulture, sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, bald eagle, American kestrel, northern bobwhite, ring-necked pheasant, Virginia rail, sora, common moorhen, American coot, semipalmated plover, killdeer, lesser golden plover, black-bellied plover, ruddy turnstone, American woodcock, common snipe, upland sandpiper, spotted sandpiper, solitary sandpiper, willet, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, pectoral sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, least sandpiper, dunlin, curlew sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, long-billed dowitcher, semipalmated sandpiper, herring gull, ring-billed gull, Franklin's gull, Forster's tern, common tern, black tern, mourning dove, rock dove, cuckoo species, common barn owl, eastern screech owl, great horned owl, barred owl, long-eared owl, whip-poor-will, chuck-will's-widow, common nighthawk, chimney swift, ruby-throated hummingbird, northern flicker, pileated woodpecker, red-headed woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, eastern kingbird, great crested flycatcher, eastern phoebe, acadian flycatcher, least flycatcher, eastern wood-pewee, horned lark, tree swallow, bank swallow, n. rough-winged swallow, barn swallow, cliff swallow, purple martin, blue jay, American crow, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, house wren, Carolina wren, marsh wren, gray catbird, brown thrasher, American robin, wood thrush, hermit thrush, Swainson's thrush, gray-cheeked thrush, veery, eastern bluebird, blue-gray gnatcatcher, ruby-crowned kinglet, water pipit, cedar waxwing, european starling, white-

eyed vireo, yellow-throated vireo, solitary vireo, red-eyed vireo, Philadelphia vireo, warbling vireo, black-and-white warbler, prothonotary warbler, worm-eating warbler, golden-winged warbler, blue-winged warbler, Tennessee warbler, orange-crowned warbler, Nashville warbler, northern parula, yellow warbler, magnolia warbler, Cape May warbler, black-throated blue warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, black-throated green warbler, cerulean warbler, Blackburnian warbler, yellow-throated warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, bay-breasted warbler, blackpoll warbler, pine warbler, prairie warbler, palm warbler, ovenbird, northern waterthrush, Louisiana waterthrush, Kentucky warbler, mourning warbler, common yellowthroat, yellow-breasted chat, hooded warbler, Wilson's warbler, Canada warbler, American redstart, bobolink, eastern meadowlark, western meadowlark, red-winged blackbird, orchard oriole, northern oriole, common grackle, brown-headed cowbird, scarlet tanager, summer tanager, northern cardinal, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting, rufous-sided towhee, Savannah sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, vesper sparrow, chipping sparrow, field sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, white-throated sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, swamp sparrow, song sparrow, house finch, American goldfinch, house sparrow

The following areas were visited in the order below: Long Beach area, Paradise Acres campground, Little Portage Wildlife area, Toussaint Wildlife area, Maumee Bay State Park/Little Cedar Point NWR, Bayshore power plant, Magee Marsh Wildlife area, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, flooded fields on Lemon and Duff-Washa Roads, Sand Beach/Navarre Marsh, Port Clinton beach, East Harbor State Park, Medusa Marsh, Castalia Pond, Resthaven Wildlife area, Racoon Creek Reservoir, Beaver Creek Reservoir, Killdeer Plains Wildlife area, Columbus area, Sciota Trail State Park, Waverly, Adams County/Ohio Brush Creek.



Curlew sandpiper near intersection of Duff Washa Road and Route 19, Ottawa Co., Ohio on May 11, 1985 photographed by Don Tumblin.

