



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Birders need to be more careful with crowing about finds

Thursday, June 9, 2005

James F. McCarty Plain Dealer Reporter

As most of the spring migrants have passed through Northeast Ohio and crossed the lake, we are left to enjoy the late arrivals.

Common nighthawks dart batlike among the purple martins, gorging on midges along the lakefront. Eastern pewees and phoebes call, unseen, from treetops. Orioles whistle to establish nesting territories.

The boardwalk at Magee Marsh in Oak Harbor has thinned to a trickle of hardy locals, affording quality looks at a rainbow of stragglers.

The contrast is drastic from just a few weeks ago, when birders arrived by the busloads, causing boardwalk traffic jams and making birding-by-ear a futile endeavor. Too often, the warblings of neotropical migrants were drowned by the chatter of Homo sapiens.

Counting myself among the more sociable birders, I hesitate to criticize those who become excited by new sightings or those happy to renew old acquaintances or thrilled to recount recent birding adventures. But it's difficult not to be disturbed by the oppressive din of voices, many amplified and distorted by a proliferation of two-way radios: "Yeah, we got a golden-winged over here!" Crrrck.

Others of my ilk are less restrained in airing their displeasure for the unfortunate trends in birding etiquette as new waves of bird-watchers join in the fun. Leading the charge is my birding buddy from Kirtland, Haans Petruschke, who possesses a stentorian voice of his own, but generally keeps it under control while on the trail. He raised the issue in an Internet posting last month, lamenting the general decline in birder behavior.

"In the past I have noted that there can be several hundred birders on the boardwalk and not a voice can be heard," he said. But this year was different.

"People were talking in loud voices rather than the usual whispers, and some people were actually shouting to each other at distances."

Petruschke urged his like-minded cohorts not to be shy about politely asking loudmouths to pipe down, if only for the birds' sake.

"In my experience, birds are not disturbed by human presence so much as by the sound of human voices. When people are speaking quietly the birds tend to approach more closely, providing better looks," he said.

A few days later, Mike Busam of the Ohio Ornithological Society weighed in with a reasoned approach toward striking a healthy balance between the oppositional birders on the boardwalks.

Crowds are a sign of birding's increasing popularity and are "a good thing," Busam said. "From time to time, though, the boardwalk gets a little noisy. I suspect that much of this is the result of the often overcrowded conditions on the walk and the fact that we probably have a lot of new birders who might not be hip to the various social mores of the 'tribe,' so to speak. Plus, put that many people in one spot, everyone excited about the same thing, and you're bound to get a little extra noise."

Busam suggested posting signs at intervals on the boardwalk reminding birders to whisper, not squawk.



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For whatever reason, a week later Petruschke noticed a marked change from his original posting after he revisited the boardwalk.

"It was really nice to not hear people until you were in among them rather than from afar," he said. "Perhaps my experience on my last visit was an anomaly?"

Maybe, but there's something to be said for Busam's sign proposal. The crowds are only going to get bigger.

Notable sightings and events:

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland is seeking competent birders to assist in two breeding bird surveys. The first is 5:45 to 11 a.m. Saturday at the Novak Sanctuary on Townline Road in Aurora. The second is Sunday, June 19, same times, at the Aurora Sanctuary on Pioneer Trail. The Audubon Society hopes to use the findings to help win designation of the sanctuaries as Important Bird Areas. For more information, contact Diann Rucki at diannrucki@hotmail.com.

Another breeding-bird survey is scheduled for 8 to 10 a.m. Saturday, June 25, at Look About Lodge in the South Chagrin Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks, Miles Road east of Ohio 91. Veteran and novice birders are invited to participate.

John Pogacnik of Perry Township found a female Connecticut warbler in the brush near his home at Lakeshore Reservation in Lake County. Also there: yellow-bellied flycatcher, Swainson's thrush and mourning, Canada and Wilson's warblers.

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