

The Ohio



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The Ohio Cardinal

... is devoted to the study of and appreciation of Ohio's birdlife.

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The Ohio Cardinal exists to provide a permanent and timely record of the abundance and distribution of birds in Ohio; to help document the occurrence of rare species in the state; to provide information on the identification of birds; and to provide information on birding areas within Ohio. We invite readers to submit articles illuminating these topics.

**Seasonal Reports are due
by the following dates:**

Winter - 25 March

Spring - 25 June

Summer - 25 August

Autumn - 25 December

Please send all reports
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Cover Photo, 'The' Least Bittern by Gary Meszaros as seen by 1000 people at Ottawa N.W.R. in May 1997.

The Spring 1997 Season

by

Victor W. Fazio III

A tale of two seasons. The record warmth of late winter 1996-97 continued into March 1997. Regular weather fronts brought wave after wave of migrants allowing for several record tallies of typical March migrants (e.g. Killdeer) while bringing some species in numbers earlier than usual such as the high March count of Sharp-shinned Hawks. This unusually warm pattern culminated in several days of record heat leading up to and including Easter weekend (5-7 April). Seventy, even 75 degree heat, accompanied by very strong southwesterly winds, made for excellent overflight conditions; and not surprisingly these correlated with some extraordinarily early finds including state record early migrants (e.g. Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-throated Vireo, Prothonotary Warbler, and Prairie Warbler) and breeders (Pied-billed Grebe and Brown Creeper). But overnight that pattern was to change, with a cold snap that was to influence migration into May. It was not just that the weather was unseasonably cool, with periodic snow flurries permeating the weeks of gray skies, it was the persistent northerly airflow that shut down the usual weekly wave of migration. At first the slowdown was welcome, bringing the migration chronology back on track, but by 1 May, reporters from across the state saw the migration as 8-12 days behind the normal schedule.

The migration was anything but normal during this period and some of the most dramatic birding events of recent years took place. Not one but two species new to Ohio were found. The Boreal Owl in northeast Ohio is not readily explained and likely only coincidental with the turn in weather. There was a strong irruption of this species southwards into the Great Lakes region during the preceding winter, and the species is thought to move northwards from such events relatively late (based on Whitefish Pt. banding data). The Painted Bunting, on the other hand, likely would not have been detected but for the adverse weather. The species is known from a dozen records in nearby mid-western states, principally as a spring overshoot. Although the bird did not make itself known until 10 days after the last strong conditions for overflights, it is likely that such weather played a role in its appearance this spring. Its detection, and subsequent observation over 4 days, was associated with cold temperatures, wind, and precipitation, including snow flurries.

Regular frontal passages began once again in May, punctuated by cool, blustery weather which kept many insectivorous migrants low to the ground; a hardship for them and a visual delight for birders. Two songbird species in particular were brought to ground for longer than we've known in the past; both a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a Kirtland's Warbler, overlapping in time and space in the Magee Marsh/Ottawa N.W.R. marshes, allowed unprecedented field study.