

THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

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SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

From U. S. Weather Bureau Reports (Cleveland Hopkins Airport)

- March - Generally pleasant and unusually sunny. The average monthly temperature was slightly above normal while precipitation of 1.50 inches was about half the normal. There was a warm spell from the 11th to the 16th.
- April - The first half cool and wet, the last half unseasonably warm. Precipitation totaling 5.78 inches was the second highest on record, and the maximum 24-hour snowfall of 7.6 inches on the 7th and 8th set a new record for the month. Sunshine amounted to but 32% of the hours possible.
- May - Cloudy and wet, total rainfall of 4.60 inches being considerably above normal. Temperature averaged normal although the low of 33° on the 6th established a new record for that date.

All records, observations, and comments should be sent to Donald L. Newman, 14174 Superior Road, Cleveland 18, Ohio.

COMMENT ON THE SEASON

During the first half of March, ice covered large portions of the Cleveland lakefront within the breakwall and the immediate offshore areas between White City on the east and Clifton Beach on the west - a distance of some 15 to 18 miles. Because of this condition no large concentrations of waterfowl were observed although the Lesser Scaup Duck, the principal wintering species, continued to be present in numbers ranging from 1,400 to 1,800. By March 16 the lake was free of ice, but as the following figures indicate there was no buildup in the numbers of ducks and gulls until the first week in April, after which there was a sudden upsurge followed by an equally quick decline.

Lakefront Waterfowl: White City to Clifton Beach

	March 31	April 6	April 13	April 20
Lesser Scaup Duck	1,022	2,682	6,507	671
Ruddy Duck	21	78	1,558	53
Red-breasted Merganser	13	702	1,352	69
Bonaparte's Gull	50	538	1,625	368

Only these four species exhibited this pattern of growth and decline, for the other lakefront ducks (Redhead, Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Goldeneye, Bufflehead) were present in only negligible numbers after March 23. The Greater Scaup was not recorded at all after that date, while the American Merganser, which is usually fairly common in March, almost totally disappeared after March 9, there being just two records of one bird each between that date and April 6. Neither the Herring nor the Ring-billed Gull was observed in large flocks, and the high count for the latter, which was the more abundant, was 401 birds on April 13.

The largest concentration of migratory waterfowl on the lakefront occurred during a time when, from April 10 to 14, the prevailing direction of the wind was from the west and west northwest. In the five subsequent days the wind was from the south and south southeast; it was undoubtedly this shift in the wind accompanied by rapidly rising temperatures that caused the ducks and the Bonaparte's Gulls to move on.

The Caspian Tern - not commonly seen in flocks in our region - was unusually abundant at about mid-April, when a group of 21 was seen at White City on the 17th and several bands of from 12 to 15 birds were present along the lakefront on the 20th.

Despite the intrusion of the Nike site and the expansion of the landing field, the remaining portion of the dump north of the Lakefront Airport again was an attractive feeding and tarrying spot for shorebirds as well as for some of the dabbling ducks. In addition to such species as the Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, which were present in varying numbers from May 12 to 25, the following species were observed probing the wet, spongy earth or wading in the shallow rain-filled puddles and ditches: a Black-bellied Plover on May 12, 18, and 19; one Stilt Sandpiper on May 18, which is only the second spring record for this species; and on May 25 four Western Sandpipers, the first spring record for the region (Klamm). (For other outstanding records from the dump see the Noteworthy Records section in this issue.)

COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

Among the thrushes the Hermit was common only from April 19 to 26, and it was decidedly uncommon during May when there were just nine records of 13 birds as compared with 16 records of 22 birds in the spring of 1956. Both the Olive-backed Thrush and the Veery were abundant in May, the former from the 10th to the 19th and the latter from the 5th through the 20th. Unlike last spring which saw it commonly reported throughout the month of May (36 records), the Gray-cheeked Thrush reverted to its normal status this spring and was observed only sparingly (13 records).

The kinglets, too, provided an example of the variability in the numbers of birds and in the time of their occurrence from one year to another. While the April 1956 records for the Golden-crowned Kinglet were quite comparable to the records for the present April, the status of this bird in May was totally different; for in May 1956 there were a dozen records totaling 36 birds as compared with but a single record of just one bird in May of this year. Far more extreme was the status of the Ruby-crowned Kinglet in these two spring seasons. In 1956 from April 28 to May 13, there were 79 records totaling 911 birds whereas in the same period this spring, 24 records produced a total of only 67 birds.

The Cedar Waxwing, which had been quite scarce during the winter of 1956-57, remained scarce until the middle of May, after which the number of records as well as of birds increased appreciably. In the period from March 18 to May 8, however, there were just four records totaling 18 birds.

A northward movement of passerine birds was apparently in progress for several days prior to May 11, for the wind was from the south or south southwest regularly beginning May 6. During the 11th the wind shifted to the northeast and in the early morning of the 12th a slight drizzle fell for a few hours. These conditions combined with the coldness of Lake Erie to produce a dense fog which hung at about treetop level at daybreak on the 12th and did not dissipate until almost mid-morning. This fog completely halted all migration through our region and created a massive entrapment of flycatchers (Acadian, Alder, Least, Wood Pewee), thrushes (Wood, Olive-backed, Veery), vireos, many of the warblers (especially the Tennessee, most of the Dendroicas, the Yellowthroat, and Redstart), Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Indigo Bunting. The migration of many of these passerine birds apparently continued throughout the next seven or eight days even though the prevailing direction of the wind was chiefly north or north northeast. After May 21 the movement of birds tapered off, and we had only a few reports of migrating species after the 25th.

Outstanding among the warblers was the abundance of the Tennessee, which was notably scarce in the spring of 1956 when there were seven records of 19 birds in all as compared with 30 records totaling 257 birds for this spring.

An influx of sparrows - Savannah, Vesper, Chipping, Field, White-throated, and Swamp - occurred in April from about the 18th to the 21st during a period in which the wind was steadily from the south. While some of them probably remained in our region to breed, many were unquestionably headed farther north for they were in large flocks that in some areas seemed to overflow the fields and woodland borders.

COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Contd.)

The White-throated Sparrow was present in large numbers until about mid-May, but the White-crowned Sparrow, which was unusually abundant last spring over a period of about ten days in the first half of May, was much less common this spring and was reported principally from May 8 to 12. Another species whose period of occurrence differed from that shown in the spring of 1956 was the Slate-colored Junco, which was reported in the greatest numbers this spring between April 7 and 21. By the last of April it had all but disappeared, and only one or two stragglers were reported in May. This contrasts with the previous spring when it was abundant throughout April, reaching a peak in the last few days of that month, and then remained, though sparingly, through the first week of May.

With the addition of the Yellow-headed Blackbird and the Brewer's Blackbird to the list of the birds of the Cleveland region (See Noteworthy Records section which follows), the total number of species and subspecies reported in the region from the time of the first surveys in 1796 is now 335.

For annotation in the "Birds of Cleveland" are the following new earliest dates of spring arrival:

Caspian Tern (1) - April 11, Lorain (Lebold)
Rough-winged Swallow (4) - April 5, near Medina (Hostetler)

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Eared Grebe - Making the sixth record for the region, this western species was observed only a few feet away and for some time on April 7 as it unconcernedly swam along the bank of the Cuyahoga River between the dam and the Akron Waterworks (Staiger).

Snow Goose - Their honking heralding their coming, five of these showy birds appeared over Tinker Creek Farm, Geauga County, at just about noon on March 10, which was a clear, sunny day. They were headed north but were flying at a height of only about 25 to 30 feet in a line spaced at five-foot intervals and were seemingly descending toward Bass Lake just a short distance away (Ramisch). This is but the second spring record for the region.

Surf Scoter - A bird on Lake Erie at Lorain on March 2 and 3 is the first March record and only the second spring record for this species (Gaede and Klamm).

Golden Eagle - Soaring and sailing on the thermal updrafts of a hot, sunshiny April 27, this accidental migrant, which has been reported only four times before but never in April, was watched for several minutes before it finally drifted out of sight (Davies).

Dowitcher - Among the varied company of shorebirds at the lakefront dump on May 11 was a flock of 130 of this "German Snipe," which is the largest number ever reported in our region in the spring and is only the fifth spring record. After being disturbed many times and after making several false starts, the Dowitchers finally "took off forming a line

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

parallel to the shore and proceeded in line abreast directly north across the lake," and this flock was not seen again (Klamm).

Wilson's Phalarope - The second record of this species in the region is of a bird in winter plumage which appeared on May 19 at the lakefront dump where it joined five Dowitchers feeding on the mud flat or sometimes associated with a Solitary Sandpiper that was feeding in a shallow ditch (Klamm). The earlier record of this species was also from the lakefront dump - in August 1956.

Northern Phalarope - Two females in full breeding plumage at the lakefront dump on May 18 and one there on May 19 are the first spring records in the history of the region (Klamm).

Snow Owl - Standing on an ice floe offshore at Lakewood Park on March 4 was this irregular visitor which was not reported at all during the winter months or at any time during 1956 (Davies).

Hawk Owl - The leeward side of an upturned ice cake was the resting place of this northern species when it was first observed offshore at Clifton Beach on March 2. The owl later took to the air flying just one or two feet above the water and was not seen again (Klamm). Not only is this the first spring record but it is also the only record for the region since January 6, 1941 and is just the fourth record in all.

Long-eared Owl - Apparently not as rare in our region as the records seem to indicate, this truly nocturnal owl was seen for a few seconds on May 26 at Holden Arboretum, where it is believed it may occur regularly (Bole, Jr.).

Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker - On April 20 in a portion of mature woods at the south end of Lake Abram, a male of this coniferous-dwelling species "was busily working a standing dead elm tree of considerable size. The bark was shredded from most of the tree and apparently other woodpeckers had spent considerable time feeding there." Although "he was feeding about shoulder high on the tree, he was quite indifferent to our party of observers standing no more than 20 feet away with no intervening cover. Our view of the bird was so leisurely that we could even check on his toes! I do not know when I have seen a bird so absorbed in his work or so fearless" (Dean). This is the first record of this accidental visitor since one was seen in Cascade Park, Elyria, December 11, 1953.

Bewick's Wren - There were three reports of this southern species in our region, where it was not recorded at any time in 1956. The first bird spent three days, April 16 through 18, in the vicinity of a home in north Akron and each evening flew directly to a feeder located outside the kitchen window to roost, "huddling in one small corner where the seed comes out" (Staiger). Not far away in Chestnut Hills Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls, a pair of wrens was discovered on April 18, the male singing vigorously and often in the days that followed. This pair nested in a large brush pile, and on May 12 one of the adults was observed carrying food into the dense mass of dead twigs and branches (Wiley). The third record is of a pair which established its territory in an abandoned orchard in Pepper Pike Village, though there was no direct evidence of nesting.

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

at least to the end of May. The male was first seen and heard on April 21, the female appearing between that date and May 4, which was the first time the pair was seen together (Newman).

Mockingbird - This spring produced the greatest number of reports of this species in the history of the region: eight records totaling ten individuals, among them the hardy dooryard visitor previously reported in Broadview Heights where it remained from November 3, 1956 to April 18, 1957 (Smith). The other records are as follows: two singing birds at the eastern edge of Oberlin on April 14 (Henderson); one, April 19 in the scrubby growth bordering a field in Bedford (Larson); one, "silent but very active," just at noon on April 25 on the grounds of the Museum of Natural History in downtown Cleveland (Dexter); one in the backyard of a home in Rocky River during the afternoon of April 29, when it indulged in some mimicking (Dexter); two in Bedford on May 14 (Knight); one, May 22 at Hambden Corners, Geauga County (Sindelar); and one which sang for a few minutes in the backyard of a home in Lakewood on the morning of May 23 and 24 (Davies).

White-eyed Vireo - In Big Creek Parkway, where a singing bird was present during June and July 1955, a lone bird was observed again on April 30 (Akers). A second record is of a bird heard and then seen in a tangle of underbrush and grapevine in Rocky River Reservation on May 26 (Davies).

Sycamore Warbler - Two birds were seen on May 19 during the Sunday Morning Bird Walk at the Lower Shaker Lake (Deiningner).

Kirtland's Warbler - Because of its historical association with the Cleveland region, where the type specimen was collected on May 13, 1851, the occurrence of this rare migrant this spring was an especially exciting event. The bird was observed in tamaracks among a thick swamp shrub zone on the west bank of Buttonbush Bog in Holden Arboretum during the Sunday Morning Bird Walk on May 19. It sang for some five minutes - "the much-repeated, waterthrush-like song" - before it came into view only about 15 feet distant and sang several more times while shifting about on its perch. The bird then flew off into a dense stand of red and white pines. An hour later and again three hours later it sang in the same area but on neither occasion appeared in the open (Bole, Jr.).

This is the first spring record in the 20th century and is just the fifth spring record altogether; the last previous record is of a female collected near Cleveland on May 12, 1880. It is also interesting to note that on the evening of May 18 and on the morning of the 19th the weather was cool and cloudy, with fog in some areas and the wind from the northeast. Thus it is quite possible the Kirtland's Warbler as well as many other migrants had been compelled to halt its northward movement until flying conditions became more favorable.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - The very first record of this species in the Cleveland region is of a female which was studied carefully for several minutes on May 9 at a distance of about 30 feet. The bird, which was in the company of Redwings, was perched on a weed in an open field along Summit Road, approximately 0.4 miles from Route 261 and just a few miles north of Barberton. Although the field was visited daily thereafter for two or more weeks, the blackbird was not seen again (Ulrich).

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

Brewer's Blackbird - There have been several recent presumptive records of this western species in the Cleveland region, but the first positive record which adds the species to our regional list is of a female observed on April 28 feeding in a plowed field along Nobottom Road between Lewis and Barrett Roads, not far from Berea. It was entirely alone though there were other blackbirds feeding in another part of the field (Davies).

Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow - The immature bird of this western race which was trapped and banded in Willoughby Hills on December 26, 1956 was retrapped on March 17. It was still in immature plumage (Skaggs).

Smith's Longspur - At the Cuyahoga County Airport, Richmond Heights, where this species was observed on several days last spring for the first time in the region since 1924, just a solitary individual was seen this spring on March 16. It was not in association with Lapland Longspurs, but this latter species was present at the Airport on other days in March, the largest flock consisting of 16 birds (Henderson).

BLACKBIRD ROOST IN CLAQUE [Clague] PARK by Owen Davies

Going to see the blackbirds come in to roost turned out to be an absorbing pastime for many Greater Cleveland birders this spring, for an incredible throng of these birds gathered each evening in Clague Park, Bay Village, over a period of many weeks.

Apparently the roost started forming around February 22 with several hundred Redwings and Grackles according to Mike Stasko, and it did not break up until the middle of April. I just happened to see large flocks of blackbirds flying toward Clague Park late in the evening of March 17 and followed them in to find the roost area in the pines. During the day no blackbirds were in the roost area. One authority, Alexander Sprunt, has said that normally the birds from such a roost range out during the daytime to cover an area of 35 to 40 miles in radius. I was unable to verify this for this particular roost, but considering the tremendous numbers of blackbirds that came flying in each evening during late March, this would seem to be a reasonable estimate. Mrs. Marian Schutler followed some flocks as they left the roost early one morning and found that they were still high in the air heading southwest as they crossed Bradley Road near the Cuyahoga County line. Mr. Fred J. Stover noted large groups of feeding blackbirds in the fields along Route 82 in March.

The arrival time of the first flocks of blackbirds in the evening varied depending upon the weather - especially with regard to the amount of light; that is, they came in earlier on cloudy, rainy, or snowy evenings than on sunny evenings. On bright evenings in late March the first few birds would arrive between 5:30 and 6:00. Larger flocks would start in around 45 minutes before sundown and the birds would then stream in until around 7:00. The large beech and oak trees on the south corner of Clague Park, as well as large trees near the pine groves, were favorite stopping places for the early arrivals. Some evenings large flocks of blackbirds gathered on the ground in the park and worked their way in towards the pine areas. On such occasions, almost as if by prearranged signals, a portion of the birds on the ground would rise and fly to the front of the group on the ground. Then when a certain time arrived, the whole flock on the ground would fly up into the pine trees. Such maneuvers always gave the impression that the ground was being swept clean of blackbirds, for every bird in a given region of the ground would leave at the same time.

BLACKBIRD ROOST (Cont'd.)

The gathering birds set up a tremendous chorus that sounded much like running water - with Redwings, Grackles, Cowbirds, Starlings, Rusty Blackbirds, and Robins all blending their voices. Shortly before dusk the sky would be black as group after group streamed across the park and into the pine trees. At these times the beech and oak trees emptied rapidly, often resulting in one final, tremendous flock. These groups would circle the pines until they found unoccupied branches and then would suddenly dart down out of the sky, although not always out of sight of the bird watchers. The chorus kept up even after the last stragglers appeared at the roost and during the time the Robins were leaving the field to roost in the pines, also.

In the morning the process was pretty much a reversal of the evening procedure, except that the birds did not appear to go down onto the ground regularly. Just at the first indication of light (at around 5:45 in late March), the flocks started streaming out of the pines. Some of them landed in the large trees nearby, others streamed out radially, although the preferred direction seemed to be south or southwest. At times groups suddenly left their perches with a tremendous swish of beating wings. This noise always penetrated the chorus of bird voices that came from the pines and nearby trees.

The numbers listed for these birds in my daily field trip reports, some of which are shown below, are only rough order of magnitude estimates and probably do not properly indicate changes in the population of roosting birds. Apparently a tremendous buildup in numbers occurred between March 18 and 19. The peak of numbers appears to have been around March 26 to 30. The numbers of Starlings coming to the roost nightly seemed to be highly erratic from day to day.

	March -	19	21	25	26	28
Starling		5,000	5,000	500	20,000	10,000
Redwing		20,000	40,000	10,000	40,000	50,000
Rusty Blackbird		--	25	--	300	1,000
Bronzed Grackle		20,000	30,000	10,000	60,000	30,000
Cowbird		10,000	10,000	1,000	5,000	20,000

FIELD NOTES

Differing Responsiveness of Gulls. While watching the gulls which had gathered on two small sand spits in the lagoon at White City on April 14, we noticed a distinct difference in the behavior of the two groups of birds. The one colony consisted mainly of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, while the other, and larger, band was made up of about 130 Bonaparte's Gulls with perhaps five or six Ring-billed. All but a few of the Bonaparte's were in summer plumage; three or four were still in winter plumage, and five or six were in a transition stage.

In a period of about 30 minutes there were six occasions on which something alarmed the birds and they all took wing, circled around, and immediately returned to the sand spit. That is, all but those birds which were not yet in full summer plumage and the five or six Ring-bills. Only the birds in full summer plumage responded in uniform fashion to whatever the stimulus was that sent them into the air; none of the gulls in winter or in transition plumage exhibited that same response. - BERTRAM and MARGARET RAYNES