

# THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

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## SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

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

September - Temperatures averaged about normal. Rainfall of 4.39 inches was 1.49 inches above normal, making this the wettest September since 1951. The rain was well scattered through the month, but was heaviest on the 27th, 28th, and 29th, when almost 2 1/4 inches fell.

October - Warm through the 20th, then exceptionally cold the 24th through 27th; on the latter date a reading of 22.5° set a new low for the month. Snowfall totaling 8 inches, all of which fell on the 25th and 26th, was also a new record for the month.

November - Generally mild, temperatures averaging 3° above normal. A trace of snowfall for the monthly total was the least amount recorded since November 1948.

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

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON

Swans and Geese. Clearly the one outstanding feature of the autumn was the massive movement of Whistling Swans in the period November 11-13. Large flocks were reported by many observers in the eastern and southeastern portions of our region, but no flights were reported from west of the Cuyahoga River. Apparently most of the birds followed the Lake Erie shoreline to the east and then turned southeast somewhere in the vicinity of the mouth of the Chagrin River. Yet at Mentor-on-the-Lake on November 11 between 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., more than 600 swans were seen, in bands of six to 100, most of which were headed northeast along the lakeline (Hammond).

An estimated 35,000 Whistling Swans, moving from northwest to southeast at an altitude of 1,000 to 2,000 feet, flew over Kirtland Hills Village, Lake County, during the day and night of November 11 (Bole, Jr.). As a further measure of their numbers, at Waite Hill on the 11th "about 650 passed low over the house in less than an hour" (Flanigan). Flights were also seen and heard in several localities on November 12 and 13, with some 300 birds passing over Waite Hill in a twenty-minute period on the morning of the 12th (Flanigan).

The first southbound movement of Canada Geese was reported on the morning of October 6, when a flock of 35 appeared over Rocky River Reservation (Ackermann). Major flights did not occur, however, until the period November 7-13, though the number reported was much smaller than that of the Whistling Swan.

A minor but significant aspect of the movement of swans and geese on November 11 was the passage over Kirtland Hills Village of a vee of about 100 White-fronted Geese moving from northwest to southeast prior to the appearance of the Whistling Swans (Bole, Jr.). Then on November 12, sixteen White-fronted Geese, together with about 60 Canada Geese, were resting on the grassy borders of Corning Lake at Holden Arboretum (Bole, Jr.). This flight of 100 birds is the largest ever reported for this normally western migrant.

Ducks on Lake Erie. Both at Lorain and at Cleveland only a negligible number of diving ducks was reported from the lakefront during October and most of November. A cold front which began to move out of the Canadian plains on November 21 may have stimulated the migration of some of the diving ducks, for by November 24 the lakefront count at Cleveland reached the high for the month. Almost 2,000 Greater and Lesser Scaup were recorded, about 630 Common Goldeneye, 180 Bufflehead, 238 Ruddy Ducks, and some 2,400 Red-breasted Mergansers (Klamm). All three species of Scoters were observed in ones or twos along the Cleveland lakefront during the last half of November.

Shorebirds. Nimisila Reservoir was the only locality from which a great variety and large numbers of shorebirds were reported. In addition to the abundant "peep" sandpipers, Yellowlegs, and Sanderlings, the following noteworthy species were identified: one Knot

on September 4 (DeSante) and September 6 (Hjelmquist); two White-rumped Sandpipers on September 17 (DeSante); one Stilt Sandpiper on September 3 (DeSante) and September 15 (Hjelmquist); two Western Sandpipers on September 4 (DeSante) and September 16 (Morse).

Gulls and Terns. Heavy concentrations of gulls and terns were noted at various points along the Cleveland lakefront on September 2, when the following estimates were made: 1, 800 Herring Gulls, 5,000 Ring-billed Gulls, 3,500 Bonaparte's Gulls, 5,000 Common Terns, and 2,000 Black Terns (Klamm). Numbers declined thereafter, but on September 9 an estimated 1,200 Black Terns were present. Gulls were not observed in any great abundance during October, though they seemed to become more numerous at the end of the month. In November the gull population was fairly large but of variable numbers. Peak of abundance was seemingly reached about November 18, on which date these rough counts were made: 4,500 Herring, 9,100 Ring-billed, and 7,900 Bonaparte's Gulls (Klamm).

Nighthawks and Swifts. Migration of Common Nighthawks continued well into September, with an estimated 300 observed on the 8th over Rocky River Reservation (Ackermann), 60 sweeping the meadow there in the late afternoon of the 9th (Klamm), and a band of 15 over Warrensville Farms on the 16th (Knight). A flock of 500 or more Chimney Swifts moved south over Rocky River Reservation on September 9 at 7:30 a.m. (Ackermann), and a group of about 200 birds was recorded at Lakewood Park on September 29 (Klamm).

Thrushes. Analysis of the occurrence data for the Hermit Thrush for each autumn from 1954 through 1962 reveals what appears to be a three-year cycle of abundance. Thus this species was reported most frequently and in the largest numbers in the autumn of 1955, 1958, and 1961. Obviously, far more data over a longer period of time are needed to confirm this speculative judgment. In any event, the Hermit Thrush was decidedly uncommon this autumn, when there were just 20 records of occurrence totaling 35 birds. By contrast, the autumn of 1961 produced 41 records of 179 birds.

Sawinson's Thrush was reported commonly throughout September and was particularly plentiful in the period from the 15th to the 23rd. This autumn was apparently one of peak abundance for the Gray-cheeked Thrush, which was reported more often and in greater numbers than in any autumn in the preceding eight years.

The Eastern Bluebird still remained scarce, though there was one exceptional report of a migrant band of 20 or more which paused briefly in a residential section of Lakewood on the afternoon of October 15 (Klamm). Also, about a dozen were seen on November 21 in Berea where they were bathing and drinking in water which had collected on the concrete base of a transformer at a power substation (Chambers).

Blackbirds. From about 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on September 14, a large movement of Brown-headed Cowbirds, in groups of seven to 25, passed over the southeast side of Cleveland on a narrow, fixed line of flight toward the southwest (Surman, Jr.). At Waite Hill on September 15, Red-winged Blackbirds and Starlings were present "by the thousands" (Flanigan). From about mid-October to early November great flocks of "blackbirds" occurred in the Chagrin River Valley. On the morning of October 19, innumerable Red-winged Blackbirds streamed south through the valley; and on the 23rd "thousands" of Common Grackles were congregated in the Gates Mills area (Tramer). At about that same time in the far western portion of the region, at Lorain, a roost of Common Grackles seemingly reached its maximum, with an estimated gathering of 20,000 birds on October 21 (Johnson). Also in the western portion of the region, flocks of Brown-headed Cowbirds were feeding in fields in Elyria and Carlisle Townships, Lorain County, during November, just as they did last year. Largest number reported was 1,900 on the 21st (Johnson). Rusty Blackbirds were exceptionally scarce everywhere, and a mere ten birds was the maximum recorded.

White-crowned Sparrow. Six observers in various parts of the region commented on the scarcity of the White-crowned Sparrow. The total number of birds reported this autumn was about half as many as was reported last autumn. It should be noted, however, that in both the spring and autumn of 1961, the White-crowned Sparrow was especially abundant. Comparative data covering the past eight years indicate that the number of birds recorded this autumn was not substantially less than in the autumn of 1960 and was considerably more than in the autumn of 1954, 1955, and 1956. As against this statistical evaluation, however, we must weigh the experience and seasoned judgment of a veteran bird bander who commented that, "I have banded the least number (of White-crowned Sparrows) I have had for the last ten years" (Skaggs).

Passerine Migration in General. The flow of passerine species (of Yellow-shafted Flickers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, too) was quite orderly and steady during September and October. There was no spectacular surge of birds at any given period, though Swainson's Thrush and many of the warblers were present in abundance on September 16 and on September 22-23. On September 29-30, warblers were also recorded in considerable numbers, as was the Golden-crowned Kinglet and the White-throated Sparrow.

Stragglers. There was an exceptional number of records of late departing or long-tarrying individuals, as is shown by the five new late dates of occurrence listed at the end of this discussion. In addition there were unusually late records of occurrence for 16 other species. Notable among these were 3 Dunlin, November 28; 1 Ruby-throated Hummingbird, October 14; 3 Tree Swallows, October 21; 1 Long-billed Marsh Wren, November 25; 1 Philadelphia Vireo, October 12; 1 Blackpoll Warbler, October 28; 1 Mourning Warbler, October 19; 1 American Redstart, November 2; 1 Vesper Sparrow, November 24.

Yearly Summary. In the BIRD CALENDAR year now ended, that is, from December 1, 1961, to November 30, 1962, 260 species were reported within the Cleveland region. In the previous year 251 species were reported. Four species were recorded for the first time in the history of the region: Cattle Egret, Purple Gallinule, Western Tanager, Le Conte's Sparrow.

New Occurrence Dates. For annotation in "Birds of the Cleveland Region" are the following new dates of occurrence:

New Earliest Fall Date - Hooded Merganser, one on September 2, two on September 3, Upper Shaker Lake, (Surman, Jr.)

New Latest Fall Date

Least Bittern (1) - October 28, Cuyahoga Falls (Hjelmquist)

Spotted Sandpiper (1) - October 21, Rocky River Reservation, (Ackermann)

Eastern Wood Pewee (1) - October 15, Waite Hill (Flanigan)

Nashville Warbler (1) - November 4, South Chagrin Reservation (Knight)

Henslow's Sparrow (1) - October 31, Spencer Wildlife Area (Morse)

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Blue Goose - A flock of 42 birds, accompanied by one Snow Goose, was discovered in a field in Elyria Township, Lorain County, on November 4, and was seen again in that locale on November 6. Then on November 8, the flock - now consisting of 44 Blue Geese and one Snow Goose - took to the air headed in a northwesterly direction toward Oak Point, and they were not observed thereafter (Johnson). This is the largest number reported during the last 13 years.

Pigeon Hawk - (1) At Hanging Rock Farm, Kirtland Hills Village, a bird invaded the farmyard on October 22 and "took a sick chicken" (Bole, Jr.). (2) On November 21 along the roadside near Stow, a bird was studied for about ten minutes as it occupied several perches overlooking a field (Hjelmquist).

Turkey - A female was discovered on November 25 at Hanging Rock Farm, Kirtland Hills Village, where it was sitting on the roof of the donkey house, from which it later flew into the woods nearby (Bole, Jr.). This bird may have been one of the originals or one of the offspring, if any, of the several hundred Turkeys which the Ohio Division of Wildlife liberated in the Little Mountain area in 1960.

Golden Plover - A flock of 45 or more birds was feeding in the grassy areas at Cleveland Hopkins Airport on September 1, and a flock of 27 was observed at Burke lakefront Airport on September 23 (Klamm).

Northern Phalarope - (1) There were two records for September 30: a single bird which "was present throughout the day feeding in patches of arrowhead in the middle of the lake at Spencer Wildlife

Area" (Morse); and two birds, in changing plumage, at Edgewater Park (Klamm). (2) At Headlands State Park on October 21 a single bird was observed at the edge of the beach, where several Sanderlings were feeding (Booth).

Franklin's Gull - Among a large assembly of grounded Ring-billed Gulls at Edgewater Park on November 10, when a strong northerly wind prevailed, were four birds of this species (Stasko).

Forster's Tern - At White City on October 28 a single bird was identified among a group of gulls occupying the inner basin (Klamm).

Mockingbird - (1) The bird which was first observed in Spencer Wildlife Area in May 1962 was last recorded there on October 21 (Morse). (2) For at least 20 minutes on the morning of October 6 in Warrensville, a Mockingbird "was constantly pursued and attacked by half a dozen Blue Jays until finally it flew off at a considerable height toward the northwest, rapidly gaining altitude as it disappeared in the distance" (Knight).

Brewer's Blackbird - On the morning of September 30 a male sang for a few minutes from its perch in the top of a tree at the edge of Sunset Pond in North Chagrin Reservation (King). This is the first September record for the Cleveland region.

Western Tanager - At about mid-afternoon on November 24 a male was discovered in the backyard of a residence in Mayfield Heights, where it was kept under constant watch as it perched in one tree and then another during the ten to fifteen minutes it remained. For about five minutes it sat in bright sunlight at a distance of only 30 feet from the observer, after which it "flew south over the house and disappeared" (Staley). This is the first record of occurrence for the Cleveland region and is, seemingly, just the second for the state.

#### SPRING RECORD OF CATTLE EGRET

At 7:15 a.m. on April 27, 1962 a Cattle Egret was observed in Clifton Park lagoon at the mouth of Rocky River (Stasko). When first seen, the bird was flying upriver just beyond the point where the river flows into Lake Erie. It then alighted on a piling along the bank, from which it flew off and returned a number of times upon the approach of small boats. The egret was studied for about one-quarter hour through binoculars, in bright sunlight, at a distance of approximately 150 feet. Particularly noticeable was the buffy orange coloring of the head and back. This is the first report of this species in the Cleveland region, though it has been observed in nearby areas to the east and west.

## FIELD NOTES

Red-tailed Hawks Migrate Along Lake Shore. (The following observation is particularly significant because there have been no reports of hawks migrating through the Cleveland region in the fall. - Ed.) Between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m. on October 11, I sighted 14 Red-tailed Hawks in Rocky River near Bay View Hospital. They were gliding in off Lake Erie at a height of about 500 feet and were headed in a westerly direction. Apparently they were paralleling the lake shore and then turned inland, perhaps to roost for the night since several landed in the woods south of the lake. The majority of the birds appeared to be immatures. Ideal weather with a strong wind from the southwest aided the hawks in their passage. The entire flight lasted about half an hour. - STAN TEMPLE

Rare Find at Ashtabula. At Walnut Beach, Ashtabula, on the morning of July 21, 1962, several of us were watching scores of shorebirds when, among a group of 40 Semipalmated Sandpipers, Jon Ahlquist discovered one bird with quite different markings from any we had ever seen before. This particular individual had a rufous cape over the head, neck, and upper breast, which ended sharply with a definite demarcation between the upper breast and the completely white under parts.

Ahlquist exclaimed that the bird looked like a picture he had seen of a Rufous-necked Sandpiper. Fortunately, one of our party, Ralph Browning, a young ornithologist from Oregon, had with him a copy of Peterson's "A Field Guide to Western Birds", which confirmed this possibility. We watched the bird for half an hour before it flew off, and we studied it again the following morning for another half hour in about the same place. We each took careful notes of the markings. Using a telephoto lens at close range, Ahlquist secured a photograph of the bird, from which slides were prepared and sent to several authoritative ornithologists for their examination. Dr. Alexander Wetmore, of the Smithsonian Institution, stated in a letter to Browning that, "I have identified your slide as showing Erolia ruficollis. The picture seems clear in showing the characters of this species". From Dr. Harry C. Oberholser came the reply that, "I feel quite sure, judging from the very good photograph, that you have correctly identified this bird as a Rufous-necked Sandpiper". Dean Amadon, of the American Museum of Natural History, also concurred in this identification.

The Fifth Edition of the A. O. U. Check-List (1957) does not record any specimen of the Rufous-necked Sandpiper having been taken on the mainland of the United States. The breeding range of this species extends from northeastern Siberia to the Seward Peninsula in western Alaska, and the wintering range from southern China through New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to Australia and New Zealand.

- PAUL H. SAVAGE

Blue Jay Feeds on Mouse. In the woods adjoining Upper Shaker Lake on October 21, I watched a Blue Jay feeding on a mouse (sp.?). The jay had the mouse on the ground and was holding it down with his foot while he pecked at its head. When I came within about 15 feet, the jay flew off, leaving the now-decapitated mouse on the ground.

- ELLIOT TRAMER

Starlings Impede Hawk. When I put up a Red-shouldered Hawk on the grounds of Ursuline Academy in Pepper Pike Village on October 28, a group of perhaps 25 to 30 Starlings also arose. As the hawk gained altitude from a position on the ground (or near it), the Starlings as a group flew into his path, causing him to give way, wheel, and lose a little altitude. Until the hawk reached the tall trees one-quarter mile or so distant, the group of Starlings swung time and again directly into his flight path, which compelled him to turn, dive, wheel, or swoop in order to avoid them. A friend who pilots small airplanes tells me that "blackbirds" will carry out this same tactic on planes. - BERTRAM C. RAYNES

Northern Water Thrushes Congregate at Waite Hill. Throughout the day on September 4 and 5 at our pond in Waite Hill, Northern Water Thrushes were feeding and calling continuously all around the pond edges, the muddy flats, and among the dead trees at the water's edge. An area of less than 100 square feet was swarming with these birds all day long on both days. After this flight moved on, several birds were present daily to September 17. - ANNETTE B. FLANIGAN

Grasshopper Sparrow at Sea. On August 19, 1962, I spent the day on the fishing dragger Clinton, out of Gloucester, Massachusetts. About mid-morning we were in Ipswich Bay several miles north of Cape Ann. A Grasshopper Sparrow landed on the vessel and for a minute or two remained perched on the deck gear. It is unusual to find a ground-dwelling species such as this flying over ocean water. - RALPH W. DEXTER, Department of Biological Sciences, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio.

#### GAZETTEER

(This is the first of an occasional series of brief descriptions of locations often referred to in the BIRD CALENDAR. - Ed.)

HEADLANDS STATE PARK: a mile-long stretch of beach on Lake Erie just west of Fairport Harbor and adjoining Mentor Marsh.

SHAKER LAKES: four small ponds lying in a wooded parkland on the borders of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights.

WAITE HILL: a residential village in the Chagrin River drainage system directly south of the City of Willoughby.

WARRENSVILLE (FARMS): a large tract of rolling land (pond, woods, fields) in the eastern part of Cuyahoga County, east of Route 8 and south of Route 422; site of Cleveland's workhouse.