

The Ohio Cardinal is devoted to the study and appreciation of Ohio's birdlife. The Ohio Cardinal is published quarterly.

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The Ohio Cardinal
c/o Edwin C. Pierce
520 Swartz Road
Akron, OH 44319

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 identification of birds; and to provide information on birding areas within Ohio.

The Ohio Cardinal invites readers to submit articles on unusual occurrences of birds, bird distribution within the state, birding areas in Ohio, identification tips, and other aspects of ornithology. Bird reports and photographs are welcome from any area in the state. Report forms are not a necessity but will be supplied on request. Unusual species should be documented--documentation forms are also available on request from the Editor, Publisher, and Records Committee Secretary.

In order to keep The Ohio Cardinal timely, seasonal reports are due by the following dates:

Winter--March 10
Spring--June 10
Summer--August 10
Autumn--December 10

Please send all reports to:

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Cover: Juv. Red Knot. Conneaut Harbor. August 27, 1993.
Photo by Gary Meszaros.

Ottawa's Greatest Day by Ed Pierce

On the first Sunday of each month over the last 20 years, my alarm has sounded at 4:30 a.m. to tell me that it was time to go to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge for the monthly bird census. Since the census begins at 8:00 a.m., that would add up to about 720 hours of lost sleep over my 240 or so trips to the Refuge.

This monthly census was started by Bob Crofts in March 1969, and was then comprised basically of volunteers from the Toledo Naturalists' Association to provide the Refuge with monthly information concerning the birds using the Refuge. The census walk is still open to the public and begins from the parking lot at the Ottawa NWR headquarters on Ohio Route 2 approximately 20 miles east of Toledo, Ohio. Participants split into groups in the morning and follow two different fixed routes through the "front side" of the Refuge. At noon, both groups convene, tally their results over lunch, and then merge for a driving census of the normally off-limits "back side" of the Refuge in the afternoon. Typically, the census ends at 4:30 p.m.; thus, it is an all day affair, although some participants leave at noon and others stay for only several of the morning hours.

These monthly volunteer walks have documented approximately 274 species of birds as regular visitors to the Refuge. Additionally, these volunteers have prepared and maintained the Refuge bird checklist, which is available from the kiosk at the parking lot.

In 1973, my wife Cheryl and I first explored this region and enjoyed quiet, solitary walks together at nearby Turtle Creek Wildlife Area. Eventually, we heard of a monthly census walk at the Refuge and decided that maybe it wouldn't be too much of an intrusion on our enjoyable weekly walks with each other to walk with others only once a month. Now, of course, with two non-driving teenage daughters, the reverse is true. We seldom walk together alone, much less with others.

Over the years, even though census participants have come and gone, a friendly, unspoken competition has developed between the two morning groups. It is always fun to return to the parking lot at noon to report an unusual species that your group has seen, but that the other group has not. It is sort of an informal "can you top this", which often leads to members of both groups returning to the spot of the sighting in an attempt to try and find the bird again. This competitive spirit is heightened when the rarity is found on the so-called "death march" route, which travels northeast of the headquarters. Normally closed to the public, this route is 4 1/2 miles in length and lacks any shortcuts that would allow return to the parking lot without doubling back. Additionally, some think that this route is not as rewarding in bird species, although I constantly point out that this side has produced the Gyrfalcon and Red Phalarope records, among others, for the Refuge.

This, then, was the setting for what I consider as the Refuge's greatest day: August 1, 1993. It was hot, as expected. A west wind blew at 5-10 m.p.h., and the sky was mostly cloudy but the day was dry. Nine participants assembled at 8:00 a.m. at the headquarters parking lot. Since I had taken the so-called "death march" in July (Common Moorhen, Snowy Egret, et al.), it was my turn to go with the six others who chose the public (northwesterly) Blue Heron Trail route. Chris Crofts (Bob's nephew) and one other birder (obviously unaware of the consequences) proceeded east into No Man's Land.

At about 10:30 a.m., our Blue Heron Trail group emerged from the second Ottawa woods and turned north towards the old Bald Eagle nest site. As we walked along this dike, someone noticed a small group of mixed shorebirds including several Stilt Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers not far from the edge of the dike. While looking at these birds, eventually our eyes simultaneously landed on a shorebird that was nearly the size of a Stilt Sandpiper, but had a gently decurved bill and bright cinnamon red coloration on the breast, neck, head, and underparts similar to a Red Knot. And yet, it wasn't a Red Knot. It took a few minutes for this breeding-plumaged Curlew Sandpiper to sink in. We probably wouldn't have been so astounded, really dumbfounded, if we had known the bird was there and were looking for it as you might look for a stake-out. We spent the next hour observing the bird from all angles, and really just enjoyed the moment. We also knew that this was a bird with a lot of paper connected to it (documentation). Eventually, everyone's interest was satiated and we moved on, leaving the bird behind. We arrived at the parking lot about an hour later than usual, trying to be cool and hide the silly grins on our faces as we realized that we had the bird that would certainly top the other group. However, Chris, who had beaten us back to the parking lot, seemed interested in our find, yet was more agitated by what his group had found: a Snowy Plover! Can you imagine that—a Curlew Sandpiper matched and perhaps topped by a Snowy Plover? Well, we really didn't take our letdown that seriously, but instead all rushed to the "goose pens" area of Magee Marsh WA (adjacent to the Refuge) where Chris had found the bird early in the morning and observed it again around noon at the conclusion of his walk.

I still marvel at Chris' identification feat. Virtually alone, without a scope and without having seen the species before, he noticed a whiter than usual small shorebird on a marsh flat. He used his field guide and binoculars and patient powers of observation to meticulously check each field mark on the bird for over an hour until he was reasonably sure that the bird was a Snowy Plover and not a Piping Plover. I'm not sure that I would have even considered the possibility of a Snowy Plover. We rushed to the area and quickly refound the bird. What a truly remarkable day—perhaps you can now see why I call it "Ottawa's Greatest Day".

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The 1993 Fall Hawk Flight in Northwest Ohio by Tom Kemp and Matt Anderson

During the fall of 1993, we again surveyed hawks migrating over the Oak Openings (Lucas Co.) in northwest Ohio. Observations began on September 1 and concluded on November 30. A total of 142 hours was spent looking for hawks. Raptors were seen on 24 days in September, every day in October, and 21 days in November. Largest movements each month occurred on September 18, October 13, and November 20.

Every species of diurnal raptor regularly occurring in northern Ohio was seen this fall. Rarest birds found were three Northern Goshawks and one Golden Eagle. The seasonal total of hawks was 4886, up more than 1000 birds from 1992. This increase was directly related to hours of observation; 52 more hours were logged in 1993 than in 1992. Birds seen per hour fell from 41.4 in 1992 to 34.5 in 1993.

Exceptional counts included 2010 Turkey Vultures (884 in 1992), 31 Ospreys (4 in 1992), and 412 Sharp-shinned Hawks (210 in 1992). Tardy birds included an Osprey on November 11 and a Turkey Vulture on November 25. October 23 produced the most species, with ten. With the exception of Broad-winged Hawk, Golden Eagle and Merlin, all species were seen in greater numbers in 1993 when compared to 1992. See the Table for a complete listing.

Although we have come to expect hawks on winds from virtually any direction, some days which to us look ideal for migration produce few or no birds. We still have a lot to learn about what is triggering these movements. Clearly, the birds know a great deal more about this than we do. We do think, however, that wind direction may alter the route the hawks take through the Toledo area. This may explain why some of our better days are those with east winds. Unfortunately, it fails to explain why southwest winds also produce good numbers of raptors over western Lucas County. Perhaps simply the sheer number of birds funnelled around western Lake Erie produce a "can't miss" situation.

Whatever the cause, the numbers of hawks seen over western Lucas County in the fall rival the fabled spring counts along Lake Erie's southern shore, despite far fewer hours of observation. It may be time to take a sabbatical and really get serious about counting these birds!

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