

and very unlike the illustrations. And how to explain the pale spot on its dark nape when the bird faced away, or the longish, almost murre-like bill?

Now of course everyone knows that the AOU has recognized the Siberian form as a separate species, *Brachyramphus perdix*, the Long-billed Murrelet. Seemingly this confirmed the well-informed expectations of those of us who had anticipated the find by studying the less-widely read ornithological publications. But what if the AOU had split *B. marmoratus* into THREE species? Would our notes-- had we bothered to take any-- have helped us to be sure which one we'd seen? I must confess I can't be certain in my own case. With my head full of book-learning and with the reports of others' observations, I might not have paid enough attention to what was before my eyes.

Even though I could have learned more about that bird by studying it more carefully, I hope I did learn something from better birders-- whether or not they were prejudiced by having read about the Siberian form-- who scrutinized the bird itself, and refused to accept received opinion that it was either a camel, a weasel, or a whale.

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Thayer's Gull. C.J. Brown Res. (Clark Co.), 11/9/96.
Photo by Yvonne M. Mohlman, M.D.

Birding the Home Front-- the Holmes Area by Robert D. Schlabach

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A careful study of the birds that occur regularly in Ohio will reveal that only a very low percentage haven't been seen in our region of the state some time in the past, with most showing up annually. According to my research, of 288 species that are considered regular in Ohio, 276, or 96 percent, have been recorded here, including all 137 passerines. Our biggest deficit is, understandably, in the gull family, where we are missing eight species that are more or less regular in Ohio.

Of course many rarities that aren't regular in Ohio have been spotted here as well. There is a twofold reason for this plethora of bird sightings: diversity of habitat and an extensive network of field birders. In this article I will attempt to give an overview of some of our prime areas and habitats, and discuss a few of the birds that thrive here.

The hemlock gorges and extensive pines and mixed hardwoods of Mohican State Park and Forest are a unique feature in our area. Numerous rare breeding birds that generally nest farther north can be found here, such as Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush and Canada Warbler. There are also some species that are isolated from their breeding range farther south, like Pine and Worm-eating Warblers.

The Funk-Blachleyville area of southwest Wayne County was at one time probably the best inland shorebird location in the entire state during spring migration. Fall-plowed and stubble fields flooded in the spring, turning to mudflats which attracted hundreds of shorebirds, including such incredible records as 101 Whimbrels on May 26, 1984, and 60 Red Knots on May 19, 1983. Ruffs have appeared here on at least three different occasions. Vegetation has taken over much of this area in the last six to eight years, greatly reducing the prime habitat. However, when conditions are right, this area can still produce fairly impressive shorebird numbers. Birders who visited this area during its heyday in the 1970's and 1980's can only dream of how it used to be and hope that maybe someday it will revert back to its former attractiveness.

The Killbuck Marsh Wildlife Area is our region's answer to the western Lake Erie marshes, matching up almost species for species, and even harboring a breeding bird, the Sandhill Crane, that regularly nests nowhere else in the state. Ohio's largest population of Prothonotary Warblers currently resides in the extensive marshes bordering Killbuck Creek in portions of Wayne, Holmes and Coshocton Counties (*The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas*, Peterjohn and Rice, 1991).

One of the predominant habitat-types in our area is the small family farm, with its own blend of mini-habitats such as brushy fencerows, small woodlots, cultivated fields, pastures, ponds and even the farmsteads themselves. A bird that has benefited from this Amish farm setting is the Cliff Swallow. Hanging on to a few farms in the Holmes-Wayne County area in the mid-1960's, and experiencing severe declines elsewhere in the state (Peterjohn and Rice 1991), Cliff Swallow numbers have rebounded, slowly at first, explosively the last few years. Now there are numerous thriving colonies, with small satellite colonies on many neighboring farms. [The top colony during 1997 was located at the Joe Miller farm near Apple Creek (Wayne Co.), which housed an astounding 503 nests. Perry A. Yoder's farm near Fredericksburg was a very close runner-up, with 474 nests-- see The Bobolink 1(2):5].

Another bird that seems to favor our farmlands is the Barn Owl. While it is hanging on by merely a toehold as a breeding bird in Ohio, most years Barn Owls will nest somewhere in our area, usually in someone's barn or silo, with eastern Holmes and western Tuscarawas Counties producing the most reports. Many older rural people, especially farmers, can remember when these "monkey-faced owls" were much more numerous than they are nowadays. A project for some energetic birder might be to try to detect Barn Owls and to find out where they have nested in the past. The area including Charm, New Bedford, Saltillo, Clark and Beck's Mills seems to be a good place to start. I have a feeling there are more of these endearing birds around than we think.

The brushy fencerow and weedy field is the domain of a wide variety of sparrows. Considered untidy by the landscape manicurist, birders don't seem to mind a bit, especially when such rarities as Clay-colored and Le Conte's Sparrows show up. The former was found by Lee and Steve Schlabach, practically in Lee's backyard, on May 1, 1989. There have been a few records of Le Conte's Sparrows over the years.

No analysis of our area's habitats would be complete without including the small to medium-sized woodlots that dot our landscape. On good days in spring and fall the woods from treetop through mid-canopy and understory to forest floor, can be alive with warblers and other passerine migrants. Add to this the wide variety of breeding birds and winter residents and there is good reason why area birders spend more time in "da bush" than anywhere else. An interesting phenomenon occurs amongst similar-appearing woodlots, where one woods always seems to have better birding during migration than others. Why is this? Woods selectively logged about 10 to 15 years prior are often best for birding, in my opinion. At this point they are starting to open up from the brushy, tangly stage and have about the right blend of canopy and second-growth to attract the greatest variety of species.

With the decline of farming and the migration of people from the country to the city during the 1960's and 1970's, a very productive birding habitat, the abandoned homestead, developed. The area surrounding a set of buildings that are no longer occupied eventually grows up in tall weeds, saplings and brush if left on its own, sometimes becoming an impenetrable thicket. Also there are usually ornamental plantings and berry-producing shrubs around, and often a spring that stays open all year, seeping out of the ground. With an abundant food supply, open

water, and protection from predators and the weather, these places are magnets for birds during winter, especially "half-hardy" species like Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins and Cedar Waxwings, with the occasional early winter Eastern Phoebe or Brown Thrasher. Ohio's only Mountain Bluebird turned up in a setting like this near Ragersville during the winter of 1989-90. Incidentally, this pattern has reversed itself, with people now moving back out into the country, with many fancy homes being built on both prime farmland and prime birding habitat, leaving land-use planners scratching their heads, and birders bemoaning the demise of their favored birding spots.

A humanly-altered habitat with good birding prospects is the open grassland of reclaimed stripmines. Formerly, when coal mining operations were completed, the surface was left as a wasteland of high walls, pits and spoilbanks. Now, stricter environmental laws mandate that the land be restored to a semblance of its former contours, and seeded to a mix of grasses and legumes. Grassland nesters such as Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrows and Bobolinks waste no time moving in and establishing colonies if the fields are left unmowed.

I have two candidates for underbirded areas with excellent birding potential that lie at the periphery of our region. One is the southern half of Coshocton County, including Woodbury Wildlife Area with its large acreage of this grassland habitat. A study of this area during the nesting season would be sure to yield some surprises, both in numbers of expected species and in the occurrence of unusual ones. Northern Harriers have nested, and Short-eared Owls have summered there as well.

My other candidate is the string of seven Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) lakes that stretch across the eastern edge of our region from Seneca Lake on the Guernsey-Noble County line, north to Atwood Lake, which lies across the border of Tuscarawas and Carroll Counties. Considering what has been seen at the smaller but more heavily birded reservoirs like Clearfork and Pleasant Hill (including first-rate rarities like Western Grebe and California Gull), there seems to be no reason why these more eastern lakes wouldn't have a lot to offer in the line of loons, grebes, waterfowl, gulls, terns, and other water-related birds. March through May and October until freeze-up would probably be the best times to visit these waters. Also, the extensive forests surrounding some of these lakes, much of it public land, should have a well-rounded list of woodland birds.

In conclusion, this is by no means an exhaustive perusal of the region's natural features, but enough, hopefully, to whet your appetite to go out and do some exploring.

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1996 Prothonotary Warbler Study by Andy Fondrk

During the summer of 1996, I spent most of my time working on the Geauga Park District's Prothonotary Warbler nest jar program with Geauga Park District naturalist Dan Best, the designer of the program (see The Ohio Cardinal 18(4):117-120).

Upon the advice of Lisa Petit, who has done considerable work with Prothonotary Warblers, we put up four more nesting jars this year (providing a total of 16 jars) in our project area on the upper Cuyahoga River in the vicinity of Eldon Russell Park in Troy Township, Geauga County. This led to eight jars being occupied, one more jar than in 1995.

A total of 44 eggs were laid in eight first brood nests (an average of 5.5 eggs per nest), of which 31 (70%) hatched, all of which were thought to ultimately fledge. Two successful second broods each contained 4 eggs, of which 5 young were believed to fledge. An aborted third second brood contained two more eggs, both of which were lost.

Dan thought that putting up larger jars might improve the hatching rate, so he put a large and small (our normal size) jar on each pole to compare results. Of the eight nests, six were in the small jars and two were in the large jars, plus second broods occupied one small and one large jar. The hatching rate was somewhat better for the large jars (76%) versus the smaller jars (57%), but the sample was too small to draw conclusions. One negative aspect of using the large jars was that one was occupied by Tree Swallows, which never happened when we had used only the small jars. In most cases, the warblers built partial nests in both jars on the same pole, but only used one for the final nest.

One of my personal goals was to pin down the days the eggs hatched and the young fledged. I accomplished this by visiting each nest every other day. For the first nesting period (eight nests), the time taken from the laying of the first egg to the last ranged from four to seven days, averaging 5.5 days. For the two second broods, this period ranged from three to four days, averaging 3.5 days. For the first nesting period, the time taken from the females' first nest-sitting to the first hatching ranged from 13 to 14 days, averaging 13.1 days. For the second broods, this period was 12 days for each brood. The first-brood young fledged in either 12 or 13 days, averaging 12.2 days. For the second broods, the young fledged in 13 days for each brood. So, this gives us a final nesting period (for the first broods) ranging from 29 to 32 days, averaging 30.8 days. For the second broods, the nesting period ranged from 28 to 29 days, averaging 28.5. These numbers are very consistent with data generated by other researchers elsewhere.

For the first broods, the first egg of each nest was laid between May 21 and May 27. The first egg hatched between June 8 and June 12, and the young fledged between June 19 and June 24. For the second broods, the first egg was laid between June 21 and June 24. The first egg hatched between July 5 and July 7, and the young fledged on July 19.

As mentioned above, while we had two pair that raised a second brood, we would have had three, if not for the apparent interference of House Wrens. The warblers had laid two eggs but wrens took them out of the nest. At least this seems very likely, as the eggs disappeared from the nest and a House Wren subsequently built a nest in the jar.

One of my goals for next year is to put thermometers on the jars to see if there is a correlation between temperature and hatching. I observed this summer that the females are frequently absent during the incubation period. Being mostly a southern bird I feel that cold temperatures might affect the hatching rate more than warm temperatures.

There was an interesting thing that occurred with one of the jars, a jar that contained six eggs. I noticed one day that the nest was disrupted. Some of the nesting material had been pulled up in the jar but the eggs were undisturbed. We cut down a nearby branch that could have given a predator access to the jar. Two days later I checked the jar again and found a completely new nest with one egg built on top of the old one. At the end of the nesting period we took out the nests and found that the bottom nest still contained the original six eggs. The top nest ended up with five eggs, of which four hatched and fledged.

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Sanderlings. Kelley's Island (Erie Co.), 9/28/96
Photo by Anna Kozlenko.