

the early migration dates northward of this species in Ohio. The presentation of even a single individual, such as a juvenile northern gannet *Sula bassana* presented to OWC in January 1993 and subsequently deposited in the OSU Museum, documented the first occurrence of this rare bird in central Ohio.

Admissions of multiple individuals of the same or related species sharing a particular habitat should be viewed as related, and will stimulate greater curiosity for investigating the cause or conditions surrounding such clustering admissions. Grouped admissions can also aid in documenting environmental hazards such as oil spills or pesticide/herbicide misapplications. The multiple admissions of horned grebes and other waterbirds to OWC in January 1999 was thought to be weather-related, and further research initiated by OWC led to the discovery of a statewide event, with suggestive consequences for others who seek to explain such phenomena.

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Birding Lake La Su An Wildlife Area

by Jeff Grabmeier

Williams County, in the far northwestern corner of the state, will never be a major destination for Ohio birders. Beyond its remoteness, fully 77 percent of the county is farmland, and less than inviting for wildlife. But in a way that's what makes Lake La Su An Wildlife Area such a productive and interesting spot for visiting birders. In contrast to its immediate surroundings, its 2,200-acres offer a variety of appealing habitats, including a riparian corridor along the St. Joseph River, 13 lakes and ponds, tracts of bottomland hardwoods and ridges forested in mature oaks and hickories, as well as upland fields. The result is an avian oasis in a mostly barren agricultural region.

A wide variety of birds can be found here in the proper season, some of them hard to find elsewhere in northwestern Ohio. During spring and fall, Lake La Su An acts as a migrant trap, sometimes attracting surprising birds for this area, such as American bittern and Virginia rail. Lake La Su An has also been home to some notable summering and breeding species. For the past two years, the site has hosted a breeding pair of brown creepers, the first confirmed nestings for the northwestern part of the state. Generally rare in this part of the state, prothonotary warblers, Henslow's sparrows, Louisiana waterthrushes, and hooded mergansers are among the other summer residents or breeders sometimes found here. Winter is probably the least productive time for birding at Lake La Su An; all the same, the upland fields attract a few northern harriers and, less commonly, short-eared owls. This past winter brought a northern shrike.

The best place to start birding Lake La Su An is at the fisherman's check station located at the south end of Lake La Su An itself. To get there, take State Route 20 west from Toledo to Williams County Road 7. Turn right (north) and follow it until it ends at County Road R. Turn left (west) and proceed less than a half-mile to the parking lot on the right side of the road. There are toilet facilities here and Wildlife personnel are available at the check station during open hours. One note of warning: because the wildlife area is open to hunting, birders should use caution when visiting during those seasons. The driving tour described below may be the best bet when hunters are around.

Once at the check station, be sure to walk out the pier. If you are visiting during spring or fall migration, scan the lake for waterfowl, including teal, shovelers, pintail, and diving ducks. The Division of Wildlife has introduced ospreys here, and they are usually easy to see during the summer. Bald eagles occasionally stop along the lake during migration.

One of the best ways to bird the wildlife area on foot is to hike the gravel service road that starts here at the check station and goes around Lake La Su An. This walk around the lake, a couple of miles in length, is particularly rewarding during spring migration and breeding season. From the parking lot, take the service road going clockwise around the lake. First you will pass some upland fields that feature the usual grassland and edge species, such as field sparrows, song sparrows, and blue-winged warblers. On the left, you will then see a small pine plantation that sometimes hosts nesting barred owls. The service road then passes into a wooded tract. A swamp with dead trees will be on the left. This is an excellent place to sit and watch during breeding season. The brown creepers have made this swamp their home for the past two years. A pair of prothonotary warblers occasionally nests here. Keep your eyes and ears alert for pileated and red-headed woodpeckers, green herons, wood ducks, and great-crested flycatchers. A Louisiana waterthrush can sometimes be seen and heard

along the small stream that feeds the swamp, and a Kentucky warbler has been heard nearby the past few summers. Hooded warblers also favor this area.

Continuing along the service road, you will pass through more wooded areas and past several ponds. On the east side of Lake La Su An is another wooded swamp to your left. Prothonotary warblers have nested here. This area is good for cerulean warblers, ovenbirds, yellow-throated vireos, and wood thrushes, among other woodland species. As you leave the woods, you will enter an area of upland fields, interspersed with ponds and small clumps of trees. Look for willow flycatchers, house wrens, and orchard and Baltimore orioles around the ponds, and tree and barn swallows over the fields. Yellow warblers are abundant along the way back to the parking lot.

There is a lot more to be seen at Lake La Su An, much of the rest of which can be birded by a 6.4-mile driving tour with frequent stops. The route goes through several different habitats, including upland fields and wooded areas, and offers the possibility of finding species not generally seen in the hike around Lake La Su An. To take the tour, turn right from the parking lot at the check station and head west on County Road R. After one mile, the road will become County Road 575. Just past the cemetery and church are large open fields. In the summer, you can find kestrels and red-tailed hawks nearby, and in the winter they are sometimes joined by northern harriers. In early spring, watch for woodcocks doing their display flights here. The road ends after 1.8 miles; turn right here onto County Road S. At the 2.1 mile mark, where the pavement ends, there's a small swamp on the right. Virginia rails have been found here during spring migration. Willow flycatchers, swamp sparrows, and common yellowthroats are easily found during the summer. Near the swamp and just past it, look for white-eyed vireos and yellow-breasted chats. As you continue along County Road S you are likely to find blue-gray gnatcatchers, American redstarts, blue-winged warblers, and a variety of other songbirds.

At the 3.0 mile mark of the tour, there is a parking lot on the right side of the road. If you have time, it is worthwhile to park your car here and continue walking for a while down County Road S. Much of the left (north) side of the road is lined with evergreens worth checking in the winter for the possibility of winter finches. It is good to remember that the property on the north side of the road is a boy scout camp and you need permission to enter. Everything on the south side of the road is part of the wildlife area. At the 3.1 mile mark, the road passes over the St. Joseph River. This is an excellent place to watch and listen. Eastern phoebes nest under the bridge and yellow-throated warblers can be seen and heard up high in the sycamores along the river, while spotted sandpipers are sometimes seen along the banks. This is also one of the best places for veeries. As you continue through this wooded area, look for both black-billed and yellow-billed cuckoos, Acadian flycatchers, and other woodland and second-growth species.

The entrance to the boy scout camp is at the 3.4 mile mark and just past it on the left is another small swamp, easily visible from the road, where an American bittern was found last spring. Both Lawrence's and Brewster's warblers have been seen in this area, as well. There is a small pond to the right at the 3.6 mile mark where prothonotary warblers and hooded mergansers have nested. A prairie warbler also spent a summer in this vicinity a few years ago.

County Road S intersects with County Road 8 at the 3.6 mile mark. You will want to turn right onto County Road 8, but be sure to check out the field on the southeast corner of this intersection. In this field summering Henslow's sparrows have been found, and it is the best place to see bobolinks at Lake La Su An. After turning right onto County Road 8, continue to County Road R and turn right. You will pass more

open fields as you return to the parking lot at the fisherman's check station. In winter, check these fields for northern harriers and, occasionally, short-eared owls. At the 6.4 mile mark, you will be back at the check station.

While there is a lot more to see here, this hike and driving tour are a good way to become familiar with Lake La Su An WA and its birds. Because the area has been under-birded, there are quite possibly other rare birds to be found here. For example, the Ohio Breeding Bird Survey reported a probable nesting by a mourning warbler in Williams County, and Lake La Su An provides appropriate habitat for this species. A Lawrence's warbler was seen there one summer, and a golden-winged warbler would not be out of the question. And sandhill cranes nest just a few miles north in Michigan, so nesting attempts at Lake La Su An are an intriguing possibility. Given its varied habitats and position at the extreme western edge of the state, stragglers from the West such as Bell's vireo, western meadowlark, and others cannot be ruled out. Given the established birdlife and the interesting possibilities, birders will find Lake La Su An a rewarding place to explore.

For those who want to extend their birding trip to Williams County, Beaver Creek Wildlife Area is a good choice and just a few miles south of Lake La Su An on State Route 15. Drive any of the county roads in Williams County during the winter for the opportunity to see flocks of snow buntings and possibly Lapland longspurs. Rough-legged hawks are another possibility. At least for the next year or so, it is worth stopping by Lake Seneca (on County Road 8 just south of County Road R) during shore-bird migration. The dam that created Lake Seneca is under repair and thus the "lake" is now mostly swamp and mudflats and attracts shorebirds in fair numbers (at least by northwest Ohio standards). There is no word yet as to when the dam will be repaired. About a half-hour drive away in Fulton County is Goll Woods State Nature Preserve, a fascinating place to view one of the last remnants of the once-vast Black Swamp.

For maps or other information about Lake La Su An, contact the ODNR Public Information Center, 1952 Belcher Dr., Columbus, Ohio 43224.

