

## Contributors

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## Further Afield

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I saw the vermilion flycatcher at Ottawa this fall. It was rare. It looked nice. I liked it.

An oversimplified view, perhaps, but the vermilion flycatcher seen by many at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge this November and December was indeed a “no-brainer.” Now here was a bird that grabbed you by the binocular strap, looked you straight in the eye and said, “I am rare in your state. I represent only your third state record, and I am the very first of my kind to be widely seen here. Not only that, but my vivid shade of red blends quite fashionably with my understated browns and whites. My outgoing personality speaks for itself, and I have been faithful to a relatively small piece of property, providing you with reasonable odds to make my acquaintance. Furthermore, I have chosen to inhabit a normally off-limits area of what you know as Ottawa Refuge, which lends, I think, a certain indefinable exclusive quality to my presence. Thank you for visiting. You may count me now.”

And indeed, many of us did count it, or at least made its acquaintance. All with good reason. There could be no doubt about its identification or its rarity in the context of Ohio’s birding timeline. This bird is rare in 2001, it would have been rare in 1901, and, although I assume none of us will be around to verify the fact, it may be just as rare in 2101. But not all bird records are quite so straightforward. What is considered rare or noteworthy now wouldn’t necessarily have been noteworthy a hundred, fifty, or even ten years ago. Likewise, a record considered significant fifty years ago might be considered commonplace today. Rarity is relative.

I have always found it enlightening to step back in time, so to speak, whenever possible, to let the voices of the past help us better understand our time and, we hope, the future. Fortunately, birders have a form of time machine that would have made H. G. Wells proud. We have the published record. Although these aging books and journals may now rest unassumingly on muted library shelves, each contains a wealth of valuable information for those who care to look. They may not all boast of mega-rarities like a vermilion flycatcher, but they are all filled with useful data that were at least deemed noteworthy at the time of publication. These works will never grab you by the binocular strap, but nonetheless they deserve your attention. Their small voices have a large story to tell.

We will set our time machine at ten-year intervals. We will use as our guides historical books as well as many national journals, including *The Auk*, *The Wilson Bulletin*, *Bird-Lore*, *Audubon Field Notes*, and *American Birds*, and also one particularly august local journal, *The Cleveland Bird Calendar*, which has been issued, I believe, in an uninterrupted series since 1905. Since this issue of *The Ohio Cardinal* covers the autumn season of 2001, we will also review the autumn seasons of the past, beginning, shall we, in 1861. Yes, we shall.

**1861:** Although the Confederate States of America had just been formed on 8 February, this did not deter J. M. Wheaton from having the presence of mind to report a large flock of American white pelicans on the Scioto River near Columbus during the fall of 1861. In his own words, Dr. Wheaton was "greatly astonished." I don't blame him.

**1871:** After a brief perusal, our time machine has found no published records from the autumn of 1871. Perhaps all Ohio birders were paying rapt attention to the 1871 event *The World Almanac* refers to as the "quasi-Socialist Paris Commune uprising," which, in case you were wondering, was "violently suppressed." Or perhaps they were still stunned by the Great Chicago Fire of 8-11 October. I suppose their distraction could have been based on either, or neither. I don't know. I wasn't there.

**1881:** Mr. A. Hall shot a black-necked stilt in Berea on 24 October. Members of the Winous Point Shooting Club shot a snowy owl sometime during the season. It was deposited in the clubhouse bird collection, and I wouldn't be surprised to learn it resides there to this day.

**1891:** In August, Charles Dury collected one of the very first specimens of Henslow's sparrow for Ohio in Hamilton County. Mr. O. B. Franks of the Wooster area shot an immature golden eagle on 10 November. Meanwhile, Mr. Harry Warden of Lorain collected a red knot in September, and presented it to Oberlin College. A lack of proper optics and the prevailing hunting mentality of the day helps to explain all these "collections"; I have no explanation, however, for some of the then-current synonyms for red knot, including "horse-foot snipe" and "blue plover." "Beach robin" yes, "white robin snipe" maybe, "blue plover" no.

**1901:** On 1 August, Rev. W. F. Henninger procured the first Ohio specimen of a certain species along the Scioto River, likely in Pike County. He observed two birds, and, "after an exciting chase of about three hours" succeeded in collecting a young male, "being pure white in color, but having the tips of the first seven quills of each wing a slate blue color." He shot another in Pike Co. on 3 August, and others took two more near there later that month. Four more were seen but not collected. According to Henninger, the presence of eight individuals, the immaturity of the birds, and the time of year "would make it highly probable that they have been bred in the State." Although this certainly would have been the obvious conclusion at the time, today in retrospect we can more accurately assign the appearance of these little blue herons to an early record of post-breeding dispersal, an irregular and still poorly understood phenomenon. This dispersal would become particularly evident during the 1920s and 1930s. Almost thirty years after Henninger noted these eight herons, the species' largest post-breeding event would take place during the late summer and early fall of 1930, when L. E. Hicks tallied records from 40 Ohio counties, totaling 1185 little blues across the state. No, that is not a typo.

**1911:** The primary chronicler of Ohio birding during the early decades of the twentieth century, Lynds Jones, announced that E. Barnes and E. Tannehill had collected Ohio's first two surf scoter specimens on 20 October, at a seemingly unlikely spot—along the Muskingum River below McConnellsville (Morgan County). It might be interesting to find out if there have been any Morgan County

records since. Rev. Henninger makes another appearance, noting that on 17 November an Auglaize County farmer brought him "a fine live female" *Buteo borealis calurus*, or what we now know as the dark-morph western red-tailed hawk. For those scoring at home, this specimen represents No. 1018 in Henninger's personal collection.

**1921:** Autumn 1921 seemed rather low-key. Lynds Jones did note that "a considerable company" of chimney swifts was present around Oberlin, and that "about the first of October they left the chimneys that they had been using for roosting places and repaired to the cemetery, where they seemed to be roosting at night in some Scotch pine trees." Also, white-winged crossbills and a single pine grosbeak remained for several days in early November. Jones concludes by stating that by 20 November, migration had "settled down to winter conditions, and there has been nothing out of the normal to report since." Very low-key, indeed.

**1931:** Things had picked up by 1931. A young Lou Campbell was very active in the Toledo area, observing 101 species on 7 September alone. A month earlier, Campbell witnessed what I consider to be one of the greatest avian spectacles ever described for Ohio—a group of bank swallows at what is now Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge measuring about one mile long by a thousand feet wide. He estimated that conservatively 250,000+ birds were present, with "nearly a million" possible. Elsewhere, R. L. Baird passes along "Good news about the Pileated Woodpeckers!" accounting for two pairs near Zanesville, and another pair in the Municipal Park in Poland (the Mahoning County Poland), but also had to relate some bad news: near Kinsman, "some ——— hunter shot one of these rare birds." On 25 October, a very late ruby-throated hummingbird was reported in the Cleveland area; today a hummer this late would certainly be carefully scrutinized in hopes of a western stray. Nor let us forget L. E. Hicks's astonishing flight of nine great crested flycatchers in Delaware County on 16 November (one of which was collected), as described in a previous column. Suffice it to say, this sighting is still rather unusual.

**1941:** Twelve Canada geese at Cleveland's Gordon Park on 6 August provided an "unusually early date." About a week later on 15 August, a black-necked stilt was found near Shaker Lakes; unfortunately it was a "dead bird on pavement, apparently hit by automobile." At Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island, C. F. Walker reported 300-400 warblers of 13 species on 27 August, "all crowded into an acre or so of brushy woodland." I certainly would have enjoyed birding my way through that flock. At nearby Bay Point (Ottawa County) on 24 September, W. Earl Godfrey, who later would pen the monumental *The Birds of Canada*, spotted two Forster's terns, with identification "made certain by rowing out in a boat to inspect birds at close quarters."

**1951:** It seems Milton B. Trautman had an interesting autumn in 1951. Working out of Put-in-Bay on South Bass Island, he could "follow the land-bird migration with something of the accuracy with which the inland observer follows waterfowl migration on a lake." On 8 September, he counted a thousand warblers leaving the southern tip of the island for the mainland, all in 42 minutes. He also collected Ohio's first harlequin duck specimen on 2 November, and had a close fly-by gyrfalcon on 26 November. Elsewhere, 23 pine grosbeaks, mostly immature males and females, were found in the Cleveland area from 20-30 November.

**1961:** The legends of the Cleveland lakefront, Bill and Nancy Klamms, counted 28 upland sandpipers at Cleveland Hopkins Airport on 26 August. Their careful surveys also focused on terns, with the peak black tern count (1300 birds) coming on 3 September, the peak common tern count (1500 birds) the next day, and the peak Forster's tern count (2 birds) also coming on 4 September. A western kingbird made its way to East Liverpool on 17 September. Regarding waterfowl migration in central Ohio, Milton Trautman summarized: "on Buckeye Lake and the Scioto River...[I] frequently recorded over 1000 ducks a day in November before 1930; after the decrease in the early 1930s the number was several hundreds; and this year 'in the dozens.'" Back in the far northeast, Ohio's first black-throated sparrow was found at the Conneaut feeders of Mrs. Mary Stump 5 November-9 December. We've had only once since then.

**1971:** An adult little gull was on Cleveland's east side at White City Beach on 26 September, while an immature great black-backed gull as on the west side at Rocky River Park on 7 November. The day before, the Klamms were treated to "a lone immature" double-crested cormorant which passed "within 100 feet at tree top level along the bluff at Perkins Beach." Tom Thomson was busy, reporting a western kingbird at Hoover Reservoir 10 October and an American white pelican in Greene County on 14 October. Seneca Lake hosted some interesting shorebirds including a red-necked phalarope in September and a late American golden-plover from 11-18 November.

**1981:** Armed with modern identification techniques combined with a widening range of correspondents, reports flourished. Shorebirds seen in Ohio this season included piping plover, whimbrel, willet, purple sandpiper, western sandpiper, buff-breasted sandpiper, both godwits, ruff, and red-necked and red phalaropes. Gulls, meanwhile, were represented by Ohio's first mew gull at Lorain 29 November, plus laughing, little, lesser black-backed and Thayer's gulls, and black-legged kittiwake. Cormorants reached an "exemplary peak" of 175 birds at East Harbor State Park on 24 October, and three flocks of sandhill cranes, containing 8-20 birds each, passed over southwest Ohio 6-8 November. A groove-billed ani graced the Arlene Brown farm in Clermont County from 9 October-19 November. All four Ohio groove-billed records occurred between 1963 and 1981. Another would be nice, right about...now.

**1991:** An eclipsed male harlequin duck surprised the Klamms on the very early date of 6 August. It remained along the Cleveland lakefront for most of the season. A long-tailed jaeger appeared at Headlands Beach State Park on 20 September—the third straight September for this species at this location. The next day, a yellow rail was captured by hand, photographed, and released in Tuscarawas County. Continuing progress in *Plegadis* ibis identification allowed for the designation of a white-faced ibis at Spencer Lake WA 10-17 October. Two Harris's sparrows in October and November, along with another earlier in the spring, ushered in a new period of "abundance" for this very rare bird. Since these three sightings, the species has almost come to be expected somewhere in the state each year.

**2001:** Crowds gathered at select vermilion flycatcher and brown-headed nuthatch sightings. Other bird species were also apparently present in the state at various times during the season; details presumably appear elsewhere in this issue.

**2011:** *Listers continued to crisscross the state attempting to track down varieties of the recently split former "red crossbill." The great-tailed grackle roost in Lucas County reached double digits. The Eurasian collared-dove population proliferated to alarming levels; old-school traditionalists fearing for the well-being of Ohio rock doves initiated reintroduction programs. The highly-localized brown-headed nuthatch nesting colony in Geauga County continued to flourish; this fall up to eight pairs brought their young to the Gilberts' remarkable feeding station in South Russell. The Gilberts' construction of enclosed bleacher seating on their property in early 2002 once again paid dividends—after hosting Ohio's first sage thrasher in 2003 and first lazuli bunting in 2005, this year Jon Dunn's Great Geauga County Birding Extravaganza tour found Ohio's first golden-crowned sparrow there 23 November. The Gilberts, always the gracious hosts, invited the entire tour group to stay for Thanksgiving dinner.* 🦉



A group of birders in the Gilberts' side yard in Geauga County anxiously awaits the arrival of the famous brown-headed nuthatch. It failed to make an appearance on the day this picture was taken (24 November 2001). Photo by Joe Hammond.