Many questions about the spoonbills remain unanswered. When exactly did they come? Where did they come from? What circumstances brought them? Why did they remain at Rocky Fork Lake? What prompted their departure? We can only speculate about some of the answers. If indeed they arrived in May, then perhaps they came with one of several storms that dumped one or more inches of rain. Why they stayed may be easier to understand. The lake met their needs. Fishes are a major component of their diet, and Jacobs remarked that after the May rains there was an enormous population explosion of fry in that area, unlike anything he had seen before. This bonanza of food, along with a suitable, relatively safe environment, and an array of bird species familiar from their southern home, was apparently ideal. As for their departure, the weather had turned much colder, the water level of the lake had dropped considerably, hunting season was underway, and the gulls and egrets were migrating. Simply put, it was time to go.

They stayed so long. They were so reliable, so easy to identify at a glance. There were four of them, and they became a state park fixture like the big cottonwood tree or the campground store. They were a bit unreal, too, so pink, their bills so outlandish, their behavior so confiding. The locals called them "pink platypuses." For reasons like these, we may too often have taken them for granted, but theirs was a momentous visit.

The roseate spoonbill's US breeding range lies narrowly beneath the 30th parallel—along the Texas and Louisiana coast of the Gulf of Mexico and in southern Florida. It is a casual visitor as far north as South Carolina and Oklahoma in the east, and is irregular as a post-breeding wanderer in southern California.

Nearby, among our neighboring states and provinces, Indiana, Michigan, Ontario, and West Virginia have no records of roseate spoonbills; Kentucky has one, a bird seen 29 July 1989, and Pennsylvania has another, a record of a moribund bird on 24 May 1968. Farther away, New York has one record, a bird that spent 16 days in 1992, Missouri one that spent 18 days in August 1986, and Illinois has old and faintly dubious reports of a bird on 28 Apr 1887 and one in 1859. The species is also accidental in Missouri, Kansas, and Iowa.

How old were these birds? Spoonbills apparently attain fully adult plumage only by their fourth year of life. Most accounts of the field characters of different age classes rely on Bent's 1926 treatment of marsh birds in the US National Museum series. The standard field guides do not go into detail other than to distinguish young from mature birds. The Highland County birds did not resemble basic-plumaged adults, nor did they match descriptions and illustrations of hatch-year birds. Authorities vary in describing the field marks of intermediate plumages, and even though we possess numerous photographs of these individuals, it seems wisest to describe them simply as "immature" spoonbills.

This Ohio occurrence encompassed a documented 93 days (and perhaps many more, regrettably unconfirmed) at one site, by far a North American record north of its normal range, as was a group of four birds so far north. They also outlasted all other such North American records by staying till 20 October; only two days later Tennessee surpassed this record with the observation of a single bird in Cocke County on 22 October (observer M. Sledjeski); a mostly white bird, it was not one of ours. *–Ed.*

Gannet Invasion in the Great Lakes: The Role of Storms

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During the second and third weeks of November 2002, an extraordinary number of northern gannets *Morus bassanus* were reported in the Great Lakes region, with at least nine sightings of this species. Some surmised there were as many as a dozen birds at once in the area. Most of these reports came from Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, but at least three were from inland locations. At least four reports of gannets came from Ohio.

Bruce Peterjohn in *The Birds of Ohio* (2001) recognizes 19 gannet records along Lake Erie between Huron and Cleveland, three in western Lake Erie, and two from inland locations in Ohio. He cites four documented occurrences between 1990 and 1999. The Ohio Bird Records Committee's *Checklist of the Birds of Ohio* indicates 12 records of this bird since 1980. This fall there were as many reports of gannets in Ohio as during the entire decade 1990-1999.

Watching a long stream of gannets pass from one end of the horizon to the other in late fall, or seeing hundreds swirling in a big circle 50 feet in the air and diving headlong into the cold gray waters of the offshore Atlantic are among the unforgettable experiences of North American birding. Northern gannets nest in the Maritime Provinces of eastern Canada and most migrate south along the eastern United States to their coastal wintering grounds between North Carolina and Florida. A smaller number of birds continue around the tip of Florida to winter in the Gulf of Mexico as far west as Texas. A few birds linger in the North Atlantic during winter and a very few accidentally wander up the St. Lawrence River to Lake Ontario, and sometimes as far as Lake Erie.

The species is highly pelagic, generally staying well offshore, and is casual to rare inland near the coast. A small number of migrants appear in larger bodies of water near the coast, such as the Chesapeake Bay, during spring and fall. Offshore in New Jersey, as many as 50,000 of these impressively large seabirds pass by the Avalon sea watch every fall. Up to 2,000 gannets may fly by Avalon in a single day during peak migration.

This peak in fall occurs between the second week of November and the second week of December at Cape May. David Sibley, in *The Birds of Cape May*, states that gannets tend to avoid land and are "probably most numerous 2-15 miles offshore, where attracted to schools of baitfish." Further north, the bulk of gannet migration in Massachusetts occurs between mid-October and the first week of December. Many gannets winter off the coast of North Carolina's Outer Banks and are "…frequently seen just off the beaches…in spectacular plunges just yards away," according to John Fussell's *A Birder's Guide to Coastal North Carolina*. Gannets reach North Carolina by Thanksgiving and stay through February.

A young and inexperienced gannet or two may have turned the wrong way this year and followed the St. Lawrence River all the way to Lake Ontario and even Lake Erie. But the likelihood that all this fall's birds made the 800-mile journey to Lake Ontario and beyond to Lake Erie seems small. It is worth considering a weather-related phenomenon, the nor'easter, as an additional contributor to the unusual numbers of gannets found away from the Atlantic Ocean this fall.

Nor'easters are notorious for winter foul weather and can cause terrible damage. The winter storm of mid-March 1994, called by some the "Storm of the Century," was a nor'easter. It left more than 200 deaths in its wake and shut down 25% of the nation's airline flights for two days. Numerous other memorable winter storms have been nor'easters.

A nor'easter gets its name from the powerful continuous winds out of the northeast at the front (northern) edge of the storm. These storms arise from especially powerful low-pressure systems that form in either the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic and then move up the east coast. In the northern hemisphere, low-pressure systems (cyclones) spin in a counterclockwise fashion. These systems can pack as much wallop as a tropical depression. Some of the strongest nor'easters develop an "eye" like a hurricane's. Colder upper-level air and the association of fronts in the system, however, keep it from being classified as a tropical depression.

Nor'easter season falls between October and March. With winter changes in the jet stream, cold arctic air often moves south out of Canada to meet a nor'easter headed up the coast. This cold air comes from high-pressure systems rotating clockwise. When these two systems collide on the north side of the nor'easter, winds can intensify dramatically. It is not unusual in these cases for a nor'easter to produce gale-force winds of 50 knots or more. Additionally, the moisture-laden air of the low-pressure system is now mixed with the cold temperatures of the arctic air, producing snow.

Birders should be aware of the power of nor'easters in anticipating landfall of pelagic species in the winter. It is not unusual for hurricanes or tropical depressions to drive pelagic species inland. Nor'easters are often very large storms—one may drop snow in Boston and freezing rain in Virginia Beach *simultaneously*—and, like tropical depressions, may be hundreds of miles wide. Winds from the North Atlantic may blow over places as far inland as Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. The important effect of the nor'easter on migrating gannets, strong fliers as they are, is strong persistent side-winds.

From mid-November through this writing in mid-December, we have watched at least four significant storms come up the east coast. Recent Ohio winters have been quite mild overall and nor'easters have certainly had less impact than in the early 1990s. This winter some very powerful winter storms have affected the east coast.

Here are a few announcements on associated November rare bird alerts from other states/provinces:

From the 15 November 2002 Philadelphia, PA RBA: There has been a fantastic northern gannet show along the coast this week. Lots have been around and some of

the birds have been remarkably close to shore. Two birds were even seen over land in New Jersey, while in Delaware, one was seen as far upriver as Delaware City, while another was in with the snow geese opposite Shearness Pool at Bombay Hook.

From the 20 November 2002 Rochester, NY RBA: Highlights from Hamlin Beach this week included...on the 18th, 2 northern gannets...

From the 21 November 2002 Ottawa, ON RBA: The fourth sighting this fall of a northern gannet came from November 15 a juvenile was flying down the Ottawa River between the Champlain Bridge and Parliament Hill and in other gannet news, the bird that was rehabilitated at the Wild Bird Care Centre was flown to Nova Scotia for release on November 17.

From the 27 November 2002 Eastern Long Island, NY RBA: At Montauk Point...the show of northern gannets on Nov 23 was spectacular, with clouds of birds of all ages (but noticeably short on first-year birds) that I estimated to number at a minimum of 5000.

From the 27 November 2002 Buffalo, NY RBA: ...at Port Weller, Ontario...two northern gannets were said to have passed by on the 24th.

The timing of these reports and the numbers of birds seen are more than coincidental. It appears birds were blown into the Great Lakes from the mid-Atlantic with the help of a couple of significant November nor'easters. It is not inconceivable that a gannet or two was blown into the St. Lawrence and reached Lake Ontario via that route as well. Wherever they came from, the gannets in the Great Lakes have caused quite a stir this season in birding gossip. So, having stated the case, how does one test the nor'easter theory?

Birders should watch the storm center of a nor'easter just as they do a hurricane's. An observer's best position is on the approaching edge of the storm, where the winds are stronger, preferably just north of where the storm center makes landfall. Here, stronger winds from water to land will increase chances for pelagic species. This is also a more risky location in terms of personal safety as well. Risking one's life is not smart, even in the pursuit of birds. Having acknowledged this, let's admit hurricane birding can be fun. Nor'easter birding should be considered with similar zeal. Don't forget appropriate safety precautions, too...

Some pelagic species may stick around for a day or two after the storm, while others, like gannets, may linger a few weeks, depending on open water and food sources. Any large body of water should be searched. When out birding on the leading edge of the storm, one's chances of seeing flybys increase. What other species should be expected? Not many folks go out birding nor'easters as they do hurricanes. Birders have only begun to scratch the surface of what might be seen during or immediately following a hurricane. I am not aware of anyone who has done any work on birds associated with nor'easters. I can imagine small birds like dovekies making surprise inland appearances. What about other alcids? How about this year's eiders? I don't know. Maybe alert readers, now aware of the possibilities, will find some new Ohio goodies.

On a final note, if readers like me love to watch significant weather events shaping up without having to wait for forecasts, here are some additional suggestions

about nor'easters. Go to your favorite weather websites (there are many) and look for low-pressure areas in the Gulf of Mexico or off the east coast of Florida. If pressure millibars for an area register lower than 1005, you might want to keep a casual eye on it. If the pressure is below 1000mb, then by all means stay glued to this system. Watch to see which direction it is moving and whether the pressure is going up or down. If it continues to fall, the storm will intensify. The closer the isobars (the lines measuring the pressure around the storm) are to one another, the more organized the storm cell is, and the greater the potential for strong winds. Is a high-pressure area approaching from the north or west? Will it collide or get close to the storm? Is the high-pressure area above 1030mb? If yes to all of the above, it will increase the power of the storm dramatically.

Finally, birders should consider what birds are in greatest numbers along the coast at the time of the storm. This would certainly be a major factor in what one might see with the storm passage. In the case of the gannets, we had two really good storms at a really good time for gannet migration peaking along the east coast. Together they made up an Ohio birder's "Perfect Storm."

Mid- to late November usually marks the arrival of purple sandpipers in Ohio. This individual was seen and photographed at Conneaut Harbor in Ashtabula County on 18 November 2002. Photo by Gary Meszaros.

Recent Actions of the Ohio Bird Records Committee

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This report was submitted by the Secretary on behalf of the Ohio Bird Records Committee, whose current members are Dave Dister (Germantown), Micki Dunakin (Paulding), Ned Keller (Cleves), Cal Keppler (Youngstown), Jay Lehman (Cincinnati), Greg Links (Temperance, Michigan), Bernie Master (Worthington), Jim McCormac (Columbus), Kevin Metcalf (Chardon), Larry Rosche (Kent), and Sean Zadar (Cleveland).

Accepted Records

In order to be accepted, records require a minimum of nine accept votes from the 11-member committee.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*—Cuyahoga County, 16 November 2002. Observers: Ed Schlabach, Kevin Metcalf; photographed. 13th record since 1980.

Northern Gannet *M.* bassanus—Ashland County, 4 December 2002. Found injured by Nick Thomas, later expired. Documentation and photographs supplied by Tim Leslie. 14th record since 1980.

Northern Gannet *M. bassanus*—Seneca County, 4 December 2002. Found injured, bird soon expired. Information and photos supplied by Mona Rutger and Vic Fazio. 15th record since 1980.

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*—Lucas County, 22 August 2002. A nebulous record, in that exact dates of stay are not known, and to our knowledge the bird was never seen by experienced birders. All scattered reports, of at least one pelican from the Western Basin of Lake Erie throughout summer and fall, originated from boaters and fisherman. Fortunately, a boater took a photo of the bird on the Toledo lighthouse that clearly showed it to be a juvenile Brown Pelican. Ohio's fourth record.

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja*—Highland County, 20 July – 20 October 2002. Observers: Joe Hammond et al.; photographed. Ohio's second record. See article elsewhere in this issue for details.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*—Lake County, 27 November – at least mid-December 2002. Observer: Nick Barber; videotaped, photographed. About the 27th record in the last two decades.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*—Lake County, 3 November – at least 31 December 2002 (still present at the time of this writing). Observer: Haans Petruschke; later photographed. Ohio's second record.

Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis*—Franklin County, 2 May 2002. Accepted after second round of circulation. Observer: Jim McCormac. Approximately the 12th Ohio record.

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*—Clark County, 16 August 2002. Observers: Doug Overacker, Troy Shively; photographed. At least the 44th record since 1980.

California Gull *Larus californicus*—Lake County, 3 November 2002. Observer: Larry Rosche. At least the 30th record.

Calliope Hummingbird *Stellula calliope*—Ross County, 28 October – 1 November 2002. Observer: Allen Chartier; photographed. FIRST STATE RECORD, species #412 on the state list. See detailed account elsewhere in this issue.

Rufous Hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus*—Logan County, 26 September – at least 31 December 2002 (still present at the time of this writing). Observers: Donna and Tim Daniel, Allen Chartier; photographed. This bird was captured, banded, and documented. Ohio's 15th record.

Rufous Hummingbird *S. rufus*—Franklin County, 27 October – 6 December 2002. Observers: Sandra and John Langendorfer, Allen Chartier; photographed. Bird was captured and documented. It already was banded, having been caught on 20 November 2001 in South Carolina as a hatch-year bird. Ohio's 16th record.