

Wishful Thinking? Speculations on the Next Additions to Ohio's List

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Almost all active birders—at least those who will admit it—have at least a mild case of rare bird fever. Nothing quite gets the blood going like news of a first state record brown-headed nuthatch, for instance, and for some of us, peace of mind comes only after a successful mission to tick off the species. In between such major rarities, there is ample—often it seems too ample—time to speculate shamelessly on what the next addition will be.

While statistical significance generally doesn't come into play with accidental species, it's hard to resist expecting the unexpected, or looking for patterns among largely random events. So, below we present accepted records from surrounding areas—Ontario, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Michigan—of birds not currently on the official Ohio list. By looking at occurrences of these species nearby, we can at least glean some idea of what might come next to Ohio. In order to offset the effect of Ontario's huge size—larger than the aforementioned US states combined—we have considered there only an area inside an arc of a circle centered in mid-Ohio and passing through Sault Ste. Marie; this makes this—the most productive area of Ontario for rarities—comparable in size to those of the states.

Ontario's list features an unnerving number of southern strays, many of which must have violated Ohio airspace, or even flagrantly trespassed on our lands, on their way to the Great White North. Like Ontario, Pennsylvania reaches to touch salt water, yielding them some species we're less likely to see. Kentucky extends almost as far west as Pennsylvania does east from Ohio, and nearly half its species we lack have western ranges. Fully 28 of the 34 Michigan species missing on our list are strays from farther west. Like Kentucky, West Virginia lacks a Great Lakes shoreline, and its consequently less diverse habitats additionally hamper its rarities list, but for some reason half the eight species it has on Ohio are associated with watery habitats.

Showing Ohio's geographical diversity, of the 116 review list rarities that have occurred in the state 55 come from the west, 25 from the south, 20 from points north, and 16 flew in from the east. Our method for guessing at future rarities seems supported by these numbers when compared with our location on the North American continent.

For each recording area below, the number of records (of any number of individuals on the same occasion) of each species is indicated; the lack of a number indicates either a single record or the local extirpation of the species.

American oystercatcher (Ontario 4, Pennsylvania)
American three-toed woodpecker (Ontario 4, Michigan)
Ash-throated flycatcher (Michigan 2, Ontario 6, W. Virginia, Pennsylvania 2, Kentucky)
Bachman's warbler (Kentucky)
Band-rumped storm-petrel (Indiana, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Kentucky)
Band-tailed pigeon (Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ontario 5, Pennsylvania)
Bar-tailed godwit (Ontario 2)
Bicknell's thrush (Ontario 2, Pennsylvania, West Virginia)
Black skimmer (Indiana 2, Ontario 3, Pennsylvania)
Black-bellied whistling-duck (Ontario 2, Pennsylvania, W. Virginia 2, Indiana, Kentucky [hypothetical])
Black-capped vireo (Michigan, Ontario)
Black-chinned hummingbird (Kentucky, Michigan)
Black-tailed godwit (Ontario, Pennsylvania)
Brewer's sparrow (Michigan)
Broad-billed hummingbird (Michigan 2, Ontario)
Cassin's finch (Ontario 2)
Cassin's kingbird (Ontario 2)
Cassin's sparrow (Indiana, Michigan, Ontario 7)
Cave swallow (Michigan, Ontario 17)
Chestnut-collared longspur (Michigan 4, Ontario 2)
Clapper rail (Pennsylvania)
Clark's nutcracker (Michigan)
Common crane (Indiana)
Cory's shearwater (Pennsylvania)
Crested caracara (Ontario)
Dovekie (Michigan 2, Ontario 7, Pennsylvania)
Eurasian blackbird (Ontario)
Eurasian jackdaw (Ontario)
Eurasian tree sparrow (Kentucky, Indiana, Ontario)
Ferruginous hawk (Ontario, Michigan, Indiana)
Fieldfare (Ontario 2)
Fish crow (Indiana reg, Kentucky nests, Ontario 7, Pennsylvania, W. Virginia nests)
Fork-tailed flycatcher (Kentucky, Michigan 2, Ontario 3)
Glaucous-winged gull (Michigan)
Golden-crowned sparrow (Michigan 3, Ontario 4, Pennsylvania)
Golden-fronted woodpecker (Michigan)
Grackle sp. (boat-tailed/great-tailed) (Michigan)
Gray jay (regular in Ontario, regular in Michigan)
Gray kingbird (Ontario 3, Michigan)
Great cormorant (Ontario 3, Pennsylvania 2, West Virginia)
Greater shearwater (Ontario)
Green violet-ear (Kentucky, Michigan 2, West Virginia)
Gull-billed tern (Indiana 3, Kentucky, Pennsylvania)
Hammond's flycatcher (Michigan, Pennsylvania)
Hermit warbler (Ontario 3)
Hooded oriole (Ontario)
Inca dove (Kentucky 2)
Kelp gull (Indiana)
Kermadec petrel (Pennsylvania)
Lazuli bunting (Ontario 2, Pennsylvania)
Lesser goldfinch (Kentucky, Ontario)
Lesser nighthawk (Ontario)
Lewis's woodpecker (Michigan, Ontario 3)
Little stint (Ontario)

MacGillivray's warbler (Ontario)
 Manx shearwater (Michigan, Ontario)
 Masked duck (Kentucky, Pennsylvania)
 McCown's longspur (Indiana 2, Michigan)
 Mongolian plover (Ontario)
 Monk parakeet (Indiana)
 Mountain plover (Indiana)
 Northern fulmar (Ontario 5, Pennsylvania)
 Pacific-slope flycatcher (Pennsylvania)
 Phainopepla (Ontario 2)
 Plumbeous vireo (Ontario 2)
 Razorbill (Ontario 5)
 Reddish egret (Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan)
 Rock ptarmigan (Ontario)
 Roseate tern (Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania)
 Sage thrasher (Michigan 4, Ontario 3)
 Saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow (Pennsylvania)
 Sandwich tern (Michigan, Ontario 4)
 Seaside sparrow (Pennsylvania)
 Sharp-tailed grouse (Michigan, Ontario)
 Siberian rubythroat (Ontario)
 Slaty-backed gull (Indiana, Michigan, Ontario)
 Slender-billed curlew (Ontario)
 Smew (Ontario 2)
 Sooty tern (Indiana, Ontario 4, Pennsylvania, West Virginia 3, Kentucky 2)
 Spotted rail (Pennsylvania)
 Spruce grouse (Ontario, Michigan)
 Sulphur-bellied flycatcher (Ontario)
 Surfbird (Pennsylvania)
 Tropical/Couch's kingbird (Ontario, Michigan)
 Varied bunting (Ontario)
 Variegated flycatcher (Ontario)
 Virginia's warbler (Michigan 2, Ontario 3)
 Wagtail sp. (Michigan)
 Wandering tattler (Ontario 3)
 Western scrub-jay (Indiana)
 Western wood-pewee (Indiana, Ontario 2)
 White-collared swift (Michigan, Ontario)
 White-tailed kite (Indiana 2, West Virginia, Kentucky)
 White-throated swift (Michigan)
 White-winged tern (Indiana, Ontario 2)
 Whooping crane (Kentucky, Ontario, Indiana)
 Willow ptarmigan (Ontario)
 Wilson's storm-petrel (Ontario 3)
 Yellow-billed loon (Indiana, Ontario 2)

Thus, the area defined has recorded 99 species unconfirmed in Ohio. Ohio's official state list of birds numbers 412, making the region's total 514 species. By state/province:

- Indiana has 24 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 404.
- Kentucky has 18 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 363.
- Michigan has 35 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 419.

- Ontario (area treated) has 68 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 474.
- Pennsylvania has 26 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 390.
- West Virginia has 8 species unrecorded in Ohio, of a total of 321.

As for individual species recorded in these six areas but not in Ohio, we have the following results (numbers after species names indicate total accepted records for all areas, with no number indicating only one record or an extirpated species:

- No species has been recorded in all six adjacent areas, but not in Ohio.
- Five have been recorded in five areas: **ash-throated flycatcher** 12, **band-tailed pigeon** 8, **black-bellied whistling-duck** 7, **fish crow** 8 [including nesting records in three states], **sooty tern** 11.
- One has been recorded in four areas: **band-rumped storm-petrel** 4.
- Sixteen have been recorded in three areas: **Bicknell's thrush** 4, **black skimmer** 6, **Cassin's sparrow** 9, **dovekie** 10, **Eurasian tree sparrow** 3, **ferruginous hawk** 3, **fork-tailed flycatcher** 6, **golden-crowned sparrow** 8, **great cormorant** 6, **green violet-ear** 4, **gull-billed tern** 5, **reddish egret** 3, **roseate tern** 3, **slaty-backed gull** 3, **white-tailed kite** 4, **whooping crane** [historical records only].
- Twenty-seven have been recorded in two areas.
- Forty-eight have been recorded in only one area.

Records for a few species present almost doughnut-shaped regional maps, with Ohio playing the part of the hole in the middle. Giving extra weight to those of these with multiple records, and taking into account recent trends in vagrancy or range expansion, the top five contenders we arrive at are:

- 1 **Cave swallow** 18 (two other areas)
- 2 **Ash-throated flycatcher** 12 (five other areas)
- 3 **Sooty tern** 11 (five other areas)
- 4 **Fish crow** 8 (five other areas)
- 5 **Band-tailed pigeon** 7 (five other areas)

The second five are:

- 6 **Black-bellied whistling-duck** 7 (four other areas)
- 7 **Band-rumped storm-petrel** 4 (four other areas)
- 8 **Dovekie** 10 (three other areas)
- 9 **Cassin's sparrow** 9 (three other areas)
- 10 **Golden-crowned sparrow** 8 (three other areas)

In an Honorable Mention category we include **white-tailed kite**, **slaty-backed gull**, **McCown's** and **chestnut-collared longspurs**, **gull-billed tern**, **green violet-ear** (there is an additional record in northern Ontario!), **great cormorant**, **fork-tailed flycatcher**, and **sage thrasher**.

Least likely: **Slender-billed curlew**, close to extinction, is arguably the rarest bird on any of the lists.

So, after the above review of our close misses, a loose—very loose—prediction might be made as to what the total Ohio list will look like way down the line. Of the 99 species recorded in adjacent regions but not Ohio, 48 have been documented in but one state/province. Let's eliminate them. That leaves 51 species. Over the last decade, we've added, on average, one or two new species a year. Additionally, one must always keep in mind the wildcard jackpot possibility of something not even on the radar screen appearing, as a large-billed tern did here in Ohio in 1954. So, let's say we average 1.5 species a year until we near the point of exhausting our possibilities. In the year 2033, the Ohio list will be a stellar 457 species!

Rather than wait for fate's cruel hand to deal us the largely serendipitous discovery of a new species, are there any birds among those listed above that might actually be targeted and ferreted out with systematic and informed searching? Absolutely. In fact, it may be in the state right now. Fish crows have been steadily expanding northward along the Ohio River, and are now regularly recorded not too far away in Indiana and Kentucky. Confusion with the very similar American crow can make detection difficult: listen for the odd call, likened to an American crow with a bad cold. Fish crows should be sought, perhaps especially in spring, along the Ohio River floodplain, from Cincinnati to the confluence with the Scioto River. Remember that in spring, American crow fledglings can sound eerily like fish crows.

Before we call an end to these speculations, let us soothe Ohio birders' bruised egos. Does our state list include any species not in those for *any* of the other areas in this study? Yes, 10 of them, as a matter of fact: Harris's hawk, northern lapwing, red-necked stint, Eurasian woodcock, large-billed tern, black guillemot, smooth-billed ani, calliope hummingbird, and black-throated and Baird's sparrows. Not so bad, after all.

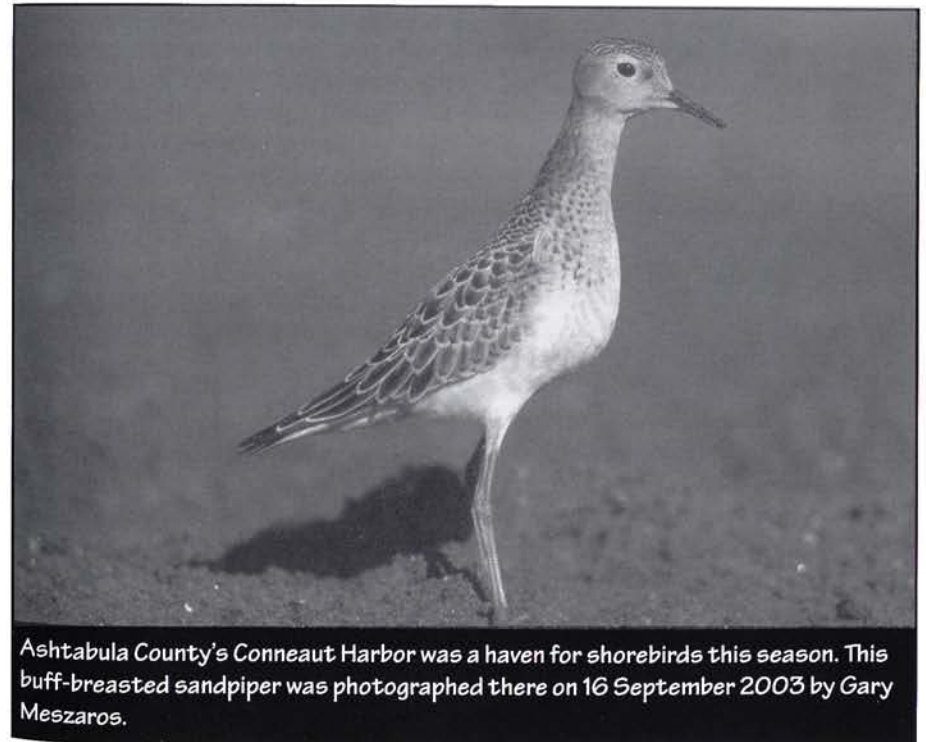
Our wild surmise is hardly original. Fourteen years ago in these pages (12(4):19-20), then-editor Tom Kemp dared a list of the 10 most likely new additions to the Ohio list. Here they are, with asterisks indicating those we've actually added since 1989: (1) Ross's gull*, (2) mountain bluebird*, (3) fish crow, (4) ferruginous hawk, (5) golden-crowned sparrow, (6) Say's phoebe*, (7) American three-toed woodpecker, (8) chestnut-collared longspur, (9) ash-throated flycatcher, and (10) garganey*. Undaunted by this piece of guesswork, however educated, Tom went on to add a list of fourteen additional potential new ones. His "honorable mention" list included (in taxonomic order) brown pelican*, white-tailed kite, yellow-billed loon, snowy plover*, mountain plover, little stint, slaty-backed gull, royal tern*, white-winged tern, black skimmer, fork-tailed flycatcher, fieldfare, painted bunting*, and Cassin's sparrow. So Tom batted .333 overall, hot in any league.

Finally, it's worth noting that a number of species still not on the Ohio list have been reported credibly, or presumably so, over the years here, but the documentation available is simply not adequate to verify them for an official state list. The list of documented and/or published reports not accepted by the OBRC or other authorities is a long one, and includes species such as the following: Wilson's

storm-petrel, great cormorant, ferruginous hawk, sharp-tailed grouse, whooping crane, American oystercatcher, glaucous-winged gull, slaty-backed gull, gull-billed tern, sooty tern, dovekie, band-tailed pigeon, monk parakeet, American three-toed woodpecker, Bicknell's thrush, wagtail sp., Virginia's warbler, MacGillivray's warbler, chestnut-collared longspur, and golden-crowned sparrow. Omitting some of the more improbable, there are also unpublished and undocumented reports of black-bellied whistling-duck and white-tailed kite that might conceivably have passed muster if well documented. So don't forget that adding new species to the list demands not only fantastic luck, but also the very best job of documenting you can do!

Acknowledgments

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Ashtabula County's Conneaut Harbor was a haven for shorebirds this season. This buff-breasted sandpiper was photographed there on 16 September 2003 by Gary Meszaros.