

Further Afield

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In the cinematic world, sequels are often held in low regard. This notion is based on the idea that even a successful sequel would be merely derivative of the original. Of course, this hasn't prevented *Superman IV* or *Rocky 5*; but perhaps this is why filmgoers have never been treated to potentially intriguing sequels such as *My Fair Lady Rides Again*, *The Sound of Music II: Revenge of the von Trapps*, and *Really Gone With the Wind This Time*, to name but a few. We are all the poorer without them.

But the same cannot be said about my most recent Further Afield column, which appeared in *The Ohio Cardinal* 27(4):152-157. Considering that the original column is already held in low regard, we therefore fear no repercussions and trust that a sequel or follow-up column can only serve to clarify any questions brought up by the original.

If you will recall, the original column was presented as a short 25-question quiz, based on quotations gleaned from the text of my favorite Ohio bird book, Milton B. Trautman's classic *The Birds of Buckeye Lake, Ohio*, published back in 1940. I chose quotations that struck a chord with me based on their precision, their eloquence, and their historical value, and then asked my reader(s) to identify the 25 species in question, based on the limited data presented in each quote, and upon their logical assessment of the three choices offered for each. This follow-up column will attempt to examine *why* the correct answer was the best option for each question, and how the incorrect species could have been safely ruled out. Make sense? Assuming your answer is 'no,' your best option now would be to locate your copy of the Summer 2004 issue on your Official *Ohio Cardinal* Shelving Unit and TV Stand, and follow along eagerly as we proceed.

Welcome back. In the original column, we asked readers to "determine the correct species through your knowledge of behavior, timing, abundance, and distribution. Some options are straightforward, others may require a bit of thought or puzzlement, while others are just stupid." In addition to a basic understanding of a given species' food and habitat preferences, one of the simplest tools to help separate the straightforward from the stupid is the May 2004 edition of the *Ohio Bird Records Committee Checklist of the Birds of Ohio*, by Dave Dister, Joe Hammond, Rob Harlan (hey, imagine that), Bernie Master, and Bill Whan. The bar graphs help to define the timing of migrations and relative abundances of Ohio bird species as is currently understood; of course, patterns typical of the 1920s and 1930s, when Trautman was gathering his data, may be slightly, or sometimes dramatically, different from today. Most will be pretty close. But rather than repeating the quotations used in the original quiz, I will save space by abbreviating Trautman's thoughts (marked as MBT), and place them in italics. Let us begin with Question Number One:

1. *MBT describes a dainty swimming bird that was not a habitual fish eater. It would produce diminutive quacks on Indian summer afternoons.* Choose from: A. Bufflehead, B. Green-winged teal, or C. Common moorhen. Of the three choices, only the teal is much of a quacker. While buffleheads prefer to dine on invertebrates and fish, both the teal and the moorhen favor aquatic vegetation and invertebrates over fish. The Indian summer timing seems to better fit the teal, as moorhens have generally departed by early October. Green-winged teal is correct.

2. *MBT describes the most numerous nesting heron, with 40-90 pairs nesting annually in the local cattail marshes.* Choose from: A. Least bittern, B. Great blue heron, or C. Green heron. Today, we consider great blue and green herons to be much more common than least bitterns. However, since great blues are colonial tree nesters, and greens generally nest in brushy wetland margins, neither seems likely to be the correct choice. Only the bittern is a true cattail nester; here is an example of the drastic reduction in marsh nesting birds from the 1930s to today. Least bittern is correct.

3. *MBT indicates that occasionally during winter ice storms, the tails of this species would freeze to the top rail of a fence. Once, he witnessed 11 tails left behind as the birds were flushed.* Choose from: A. Mourning dove, B. Common grackle, or C. Brown creeper. Brown creeper is one of those stupid choices alluded to earlier; not only do they have fairly short tails, they very seldom congregate in flocks of 11 atop fence rails. The dove and the grackle are better options, but only the dove is particularly known for ice-induced tails of woe. Mourning dove is correct.

4. *MBT notes 32 of these tiny birds migrating low over Buckeye Lake in the span of two hours on 1 September 1931.* Choose from: A. Brown creeper, B. Ruby-throated hummingbird, or C. Golden-crowned kinglet. All three options are in fact tiny birds, and are migrants as well. But on this date the creeper and the kinglet would not yet have arrived in any numbers, and would be very rare at best. The hummingbird, however, would still be a common migrant in early September. Ruby-throated hummingbird is correct.

5. *MBT reports that a survey of Onion Island on 9 June 1928 discovered 35 nests, only five of which contained eggs or young, the remainder being dummy nests. The nests were of the customary globular shape.* Choose from: A. Baltimore oriole, B. Sedge wren, or C. Marsh wren. Baltimore oriole does indeed construct a fairly globby nest, but orioles are not known for creating dummy or false nests. Some wren species are, however, notorious for this behavior, although marsh wren seems more inclined to this activity than does sedge wren. Also, the fact that 35 nests were found on a single day certainly favors marsh wren over the generally rare sedge variety. Marsh wren is correct.

6. *MBT tracks the most remarkable change in status of any bird during his study, erupting from 0 in 1922, to 8000 in a day in 1929, to 132,300 birds in one roost in 1935.* Choose from: A. Brown-headed cowbird, B. House sparrow, or C. European starling. All three choices seem reasonable, as all are known for their exponential increases over the years. However, the native cowbird and introduced exotic house

sparrow were already common throughout Ohio by 1922. Conversely, the exotic starling was first noted in Ohio in 1916, with the first nesting observed in 1920. Numbers quickly mushroomed, and to this day they are still on the abundant side. European starling is correct, if vulgar.

7. *MBT meticulously describes the stomach contents of a bird collected on 11 November 1933. It contained mostly duckweed plants and smartweed seeds.* Choose from: A. Northern shoveler, B. Common goldeneye, or C. Hooded merganser. The timing seems suitable for all three; also, as duckweed and smartweed are both wetland plants, any species of waterfowl may seem reasonable at first glance. The merganser, however, is very strongly piscivorous, and the goldeneye also strongly prefers a meaty diet over salad greens. Shovelers are indeed fond of invertebrates, but they also love a good salad, especially a splendid duckweed salad, topped with savory vinaigrette dressing, and with a frosted glass of skim milk on the side. Northern shoveler is correct, if snooty.

8. *MBT recalls the beloved 'partridge,' which had become only a fond memory of the older men by the time of his study.* Choose from: A. Ruffed grouse, B. Greater prairie-chicken, or C. Gray partridge. Choice B seems a likely candidate; however this species was essentially a bird of the remnant prairie openings in northwestern and west-central Ohio, not the Buckeye Lake region of east-central Ohio. The exotic gray partridge was still being introduced into Ohio during Trautman's study in the 1920s and 1930s, leaving only ruffed grouse as a viable alternative. Habitat destruction and hunting pressures helped to eliminate the local grouse population by about 1900, making ruffed grouse the correct choice.

9. *MBT tallies 77 individuals of this heron on 9 August 1930.* Choose from: A. Cattle egret, B. Little blue heron, or C. Yellow-crowned night-heron. On the surface, none of the choices seem plausible. Cattle egret was not even discovered in Ohio until 1958, which makes 77 of them in 1930 exceedingly unlikely. Today we recognize little blue heron as a rare species, but the yellow-crowned was presumably just as much a skulker and a loner in 1930 as it is today. It hardly seems reasonable that 77 yellow-crowns would allow themselves to be tallied in a single day; this then brings us back to the little blue heron. Although it may now be hard to conceive, during Trautman's study this species was often a common late summer invader from the south. Astonishingly, the 1930 invasion accounted for no fewer than 1185 individuals being tallied from across the state. Little blue heron is correct, if astonishing.

10. *MBT describes the 'wild, free scream' of this hawk as they established their nesting territories in early March.* Choose from: A. Red-shouldered hawk, B. Broad-winged hawk, or C. Chimney swift. It should be apparent that chimney swift is a remarkably poor choice, since it is not a hawk, it does not produce a wild, free scream, and it is still cavorting about the Amazon Basin in March. The other two options are at least hawks, and although both could be said to scream, I'd call the broad-winged's vocalization more of a wild, free whistle than a wild, free scream. Also, since broad-wingeds don't arrive in Ohio in any numbers until mid-April, this clinches red-shouldered hawk as the correct answer.

11. *MBT reports that over 50 pairs of this species nested annually between 1922 and 1930, with nests found in a wide variety of habitats ranging from marshes, buttonbush swamps, wet prairies, and edges of marshy pools in swamp forests.* Choose from: A. Red-winged blackbird, B. Common yellowthroat, or C. King rail. The variety of habitats appears suitable for the wide-ranging blackbird and yellowthroat, but 50 pairs spread over 44 square miles of the Buckeye Lake area seems far too small a number for these very common species. But king rail—in these numbers and with this range of nesting habitats? Amazingly, king rail is correct. Today, five pairs statewide would be considered a banner year.

12. *MBT recounts that until 1900 this species was considered a game bird and was often used in the making of potpies.* Choose from: A. Northern flicker, B. Red-winged blackbird, or C. Black vulture. Ah, vulture pie. Let's quickly rule out that choice, except, perhaps, after a sumptuous meal of skunk flambé and a fine radish wine. More tastefully, you will recall the nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence," in which four and twenty blackbirds were baked in a pie. But this was a British tale, and the blackbirds were the common blackbird *Turdus merula*, a European member of the thrush family. They made a fine flicker pie at Buckeye Lake, at least back when the yellowhammer was considered a worthy opponent for area sportsmen.

13. *MBT collects an unusual gull on 7 November 1925, after strong northeasterly gales. It provided Ohio's first specimen of the species.* Choose from: A. California gull, B. Mew gull, or C. Black-legged kittiwake. Assuming that the northeasterly gales influenced the presence of this bird, we can presumably eliminate California gull, a species of western North America. The North American race of the mew gull *Larus camus brachyrhynchus* is also primarily a western species, although there is a slim chance that one of the European races, known as common gull, could also appear here. In Ohio, black-legged kittiwakes are often associated with strong northeasterly winds, and are presumably brought down to us from points to the north and east. Any of these tenuous suppositions can quickly be set aside, however, when we consider that Ohio's first verifiable sighting of California gull wasn't made until 1979, and that our first mew gull wasn't recorded until 1981, some 55 years after Trautman collected his black-legged kittiwake.

14. *MBT tells of an abundant nesting species, found especially in lowlands and along the lakeshore. On 12 June 1928, he censused 218 singing males along one mile of shore; the birds sang a slowly drawled 'sweet-cheeuu.'* Choose from: A. Acadian flycatcher, B. Alder flycatcher, or C. Willow flycatcher. Think "habitat," and think "song." Acadian flycatcher is a bird of mature forests, not typically found in brushy lakeshore lowlands. Its explosive *peet-sa* song also helps to eliminate it from competition. Both alder and willow flycatchers, however, favor wet scrubby areas. The alder often prefers slightly wetter habitats in Ohio than does the willow, but this is only a general rule. The song of the alder, frequently described as *fee-bee-o*, consists of three syllables, while the song of the willow, a snappy *fitz-bew*, seems to better fit Trautman's description of the song. Nesting willows are also much more common in Ohio than alders; 218 in only one mile effectively eliminates Alder, and boggles the mind. Willow flycatcher is correct.

15. *MBT tells of a migrant more common between 18 September and 25 October than at any other time of the year. Daily, 50-500 could be found, primarily in close-cropped fields. Choose from: A. Vesper sparrow, B. Horned lark, or C. Lapland longspur. This one is tricky. First, the habitat seems suitable for all three options. We can eliminate the longspur, however, since it typically doesn't arrive here in peak numbers until mid-November. Based on current status, the best choice would seem to be the lark, since only a relative few vespers are noted as fall migrants today. Our nesting race of horned lark *Eremophila alpestris praticola* is indeed moving in numbers within this time frame, although we seldom pay them much attention. Believe it or not, the correct answer is actually vesper sparrow, which has certainly declined drastically since Trautman's day. Habitat alterations, including the move to "cleaner" farming practices, have undoubtedly played a major role in this decline.*

16. *MBT relates that he did not find this species at all from 1922-25, but then discovered it to be a rare but regular, if secretive, transient and nester, especially from 1930-33. He attributed this not to an increase in the species, but to his newly acquired knowledge of its song and habits. Choose from: A. Lark sparrow, B. Le Conte's sparrow, or C. Henslow's sparrow. This one is fairly straightforward. Le Conte's sparrow has never been known to nest in Ohio. Lark sparrows, although rare transients and nesters, are anything but secretive. The furtive Henslow's sparrow is the correct answer; its skulking habits and insect-like song have undoubtedly caused many a birder to overlook its presence over the years.*

17. *MBT describes the familiar nocturnal flight calls of fall migrants of this species, which could be heard almost nightly by early July. Only occasional migrants could be heard after 10 September. Choose from: A. Yellow warbler, B. Lesser yellowlegs, or C. Yellow-rumped warbler. Choices A and B are both known as early fall migrants, but yellow-rumped warbler does not usually begin to reach peak numbers here until late September. While both yellow warbler and lesser yellowlegs are moving by early July, the warbler also ends its flights over Ohio quickly, with the vast majority having passed through by late August and early September. Good numbers of lesser yellowlegs are normally present through mid-October. Yellow warbler is correct.*

18. *MBT describes the feeding and display habits of a raptor, in which the male flew over a nest and dropped a prey item. The female then rose from the nest, turned on her back, and caught the prey in midair. Choose from: A. Cooper's hawk, B. Northern harrier, or C. American kestrel. This behavior is a small portion of the classic display of the northern harrier. As Ohio's nesting harriers have declined to a precious few, we now only rarely have the opportunity to witness this spectacle. Northern harrier is correct.*

19. *MBT describes another fall migrant, this one peaking in late September and early October. When he persistently worked the dense marsh vegetation, he found 25-37 individuals, although he believed 100-200 to be present. Choose from: A. Pied-billed grebe, B. Sora, or C. American bittern. The timing seems reasonable for all three choices, but Trautman's wording that he "worked" the dense marsh vegetation*

suggests that he was actually amidst the vegetation, rather than just scanning the open water or watery edges. This seems to eliminate the grebe, but both the sora and the bittern would favor the cover of the vegetation. If we base our decision on today's abundances, the uncommon sora would seem the better choice, as the bittern is now decidedly rare. However, the correct answer is American bittern. I recognize that there really is no good way to make this distinction, but I included the question, along with several other similar examples, to illustrate dramatic historical changes. For most of our marsh birds, that would represent a dramatic change for the worse.

20. *MBT pinpoints the many field marks he used to identify this fall shorebird. These include the preference for deeper water than many of its kin, their slightly down-curved bills, and the presence of chestnut-red feathering on their shoulders, back, and wings. Choose from: A. Dunlin, B. Baird's sandpiper, or C. Western sandpiper. We can eliminate the Baird's due to its preference for the drier portions of mudflats. Both dunlin and western have downwardly curving bills, but most fall migrant dunlins seen in Ohio have very plain gray backs and wings. Western sandpiper fits the bill. Although still rare, and still a difficult ID, Trautman accurately described the many field marks of the western sandpiper, and in great detail, back in 1940.*

21. *MBT portrays a spring migrant which arrived in late March and peaked in mid- to late-April, with as many as 15 seen in a day. They preferred osage-orange hedges and brushy pastures. Choose from: A. American woodcock, B. Loggerhead shrike, or C. Bewick's wren. Another toughie. Since the species in question arrives in late March, that seems a bit too late for the woodcock, which often arrives in late February or early March. However, the timing is appropriate for both the shrike and the wren; at least it was back when we had populations of both large enough to allow us to detect migrational patterns. Loggerhead shrike is correct, with their notable preference for osage-orange being the best clue provided.*

22. *MBT relates how his imitation of an Eastern screech-owl whistle could draw out many sparrows from brushy tangles and weedy fields. Once accomplished, the species in question would perch in the open with crest elevated; as many as 42 were found in a day. Choose from: A. Lincoln's sparrow, B. White-throated sparrow, or C. Grasshopper sparrow. Lincoln's sparrow is a notorious crest-raiser, and is therefore among the most furious appearing of all sparrows. Migrant grasshopper sparrows don't usually accumulate in numbers in Ohio, and they also sport a very flat-headed look. White-throateds are certainly flockers, and certainly respond vigorously to a screech-owl whistle, but they also aren't especially known for raising their crown feathers. Moreover, a maximum of 42 seems too few for this very common species. Lincoln's sparrow is correct.*

23. *MBT describes the loud, persistent song of this secretive late May migrant as 'chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, quoit'. Choose from: A. Mourning warbler, B. Connecticut warbler, or C. Belted kingfisher. You'd be very wrong if you chose belted kingfisher, and you know it. Choices A and B, however, are both late May migrants, and both are secretive. Their songs are different though; the mourning's*

song, which for some reason is frequently heard as background music in television commercials, is often described as a burry *churry, churry, churry, chorry, chorry*. The song of the Connecticut sounds more like a loud, ringing *chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, quoit*. Can you tell that I enjoy typing *chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, chip-a-dilly, quoit*? Well, I do. Perhaps too much. Connecticut warbler is correct.

24. MBT witnesses a peculiar performance on 31 October 1925, when two whitish birds on a brown mudflat noticed a Cooper's Hawk overhead. The whitish birds ran to a small patch of snow and remained motionless until the hawk had passed. Choose from: A. Piping plover, B. Sanderling, or C. American white pelican. If you chose the pelican, you probably also chose kingfisher for the previous question. The plover and sanderling are better choices, but most individuals of the rare piping plover would have already passed through between mid-July and mid-September. October 31 would be extremely late for the plover, but only marginally late for sanderling. Sanderling is correct.

25. MBT describes the fall nocturnal flight calls of another species, which peaked in August. He found the 'puttie-putt-putt' notes of the southbound migrants as pleasing as the prolonged whistles of the species in spring. Choose from: A. Eastern meadowlark, B. Swainson's thrush, or C. Upland sandpiper. We may not all find *puttie-putt-putt* sounds pleasing, but that is not the point. Instead, here is yet another case of a formerly common bird that has become quite rare today. Upland sandpiper is correct; neither the meadowlark nor the thrush produces the described vocalizations, and the August migrational peak is also inappropriate for both, with the meadowlark peaking in October, and the thrush in September. We need more upland sandpipers—what a great bird.

That's all I can stand. I hope this clears up any lingering questions concerning the original column. If not, let me know. And you really should try and track down Trautman's *The Birds of Buckeye Lake, Ohio*, published in 1940 by the University of Michigan Press. It's worth the effort, and as you can tell, Milt writes better than I. Much better. ♣

Early Ohio Ornithologists: John Maynard Wheaton, 1840-1887

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A number of years ago, as a fledgling employee of the Ohio Historical Society I was examining some of our bird study skins. While the OHS natural history collections are small compared to some other collections in Ohio, there are some interesting items among the 2300 or so bird specimens we maintain. As I went from drawer to drawer, I came upon one that held a sheet of metal, roughly 18 x 24 inches. One side was painted black, edged narrowly in gold, with gold letters reading "Doctor Wheaton." It was obviously quite old and well worn. As I looked further, I noticed a number of the oldest specimens in our bird collection carried an extra label: "Wheaton Collection." I have since learned that OHS has 100 birds from the Wheaton Collection in our facility, and has placed another 500 on long-term loan to The Ohio State University. In those early days, as a novice Ohioan I had no idea who this man was, but the doctor's shingle and two folding insect nets tucked into a cabinet of bird specimens captured my curiosity. I have found out over the years that Wheaton was a truly fascinating man. He was one of Ohio's premier nineteenth-century students of ornithology. Among the dozen or so works Wheaton published on birds, he is best known for his 1860 *Catalogue of the Birds of Ohio*, and his updated 1882 *Report of the Birds of Ohio*. But that is just the start of a look at his life and influence.

Wheaton was born in Columbus, Ohio on 18 May 1840. Even early in his youth he had a strong interest in birds as well as other animals. His father having died while he was quite young, his mother often had to reprimand him for not finishing work he had promised, instead spending his time in the woods.

Upon completing public schooling in Columbus in 1857, J. M. Wheaton entered Denison University in Granville. Denison had no gymnasium, but he got plenty of exercise from long walks in the countryside. Frequently he returned from such walks with insect or bird specimens collected along the way. In 1860 Wheaton graduated from Denison, and then joined the Starling Medical College, the forerunner of the University Hospitals at The Ohio State University.

Upon completing his studies at the medical college, Wheaton enlisted on 4 March 1865 at Camp Chase in Columbus as assistant surgeon to the 188th Ohio Volunteer Infantry to serve in the Civil War. At least one biographer suggests he was tempted to enlist earlier, but felt he would be more useful as a surgeon than a regular soldier. Wheaton's tenure in the military was short. Lee's surrender at Appomattox was just over a month away. He was mustered out on 21 September 1865, having served less than seven months.

After the war, Wheaton returned home and set up medical practice in his parents' home on the northeast corner of Fourth and Oak Streets in Columbus. I found it interesting that he was born, raised, conducted his medical practice, stored his natural history specimens, and finally died all in the same house. His mother continued to live