

Fifty Years of Spring Migration in Lorain County

Lynds Jones's Notes, 1896-1945

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Lynds Jones (1865-1951) is among our eminent ornithologists. He founded the *Wilson Bulletin*, one of North America's leading ornithological journals, in 1888. At Oberlin College seven years later he became the first university instructor in ornithology in the United States. He later served as curator of Oberlin's zoological museum. Along with hundreds of articles about birds, he published in 1903 *The Birds of Ohio: A Revised Catalogue*, which he described as a revision of Wheaton's 1882 *Report on the Birds of Ohio*. Jones's catalogue formed the basis for *The Birds of Ohio*, a popular work published the same year by his student and colleague William Leon Dawson. To the latter work Jones contributed the introduction and an analytical key to the identification of Ohio's bird species. Jones and Dawson were tireless field observers, and started the first systematic "big days," traveling Lorain County by streetcar, rowboat, and on foot each spring to find birds, and challenging others to surpass their total numbers of species seen in a single day.

In the background of Jones's published work lay decades of field experience. He made Oberlin his home from 1890 until his death, during which time he kept copious records of bird observations made during innumerable field trips there and elsewhere in Lorain County. In many years records show he was out birding every day there from 1 January through 1 June. One hitherto unpublished distillation of his observations takes the form of 384 double binder pages covering the years 1896 through 1945, their contents arranged in a grid titled "Migration Record of [species name] at Oberlin, Ohio," on which are entered in a small neat hand migration dates, numbers, and comments for 194 Lorain County species. His records for spring migration in these pages are far more numerous than those for fall.

The careful accumulation of so many sightings in one locale by an authority on field identification of birds offers a very reliable picture of bird migration at this latitude in Ohio. It can form the basis for useful comparisons with the timing of migrations in the present day, providing insight, for example, into questions about whether and how much climate change and other factors may have altered migration schedules and the status of certain species over the past 50-100 years.

These dates should be widely applicable across Ohio for true migrants. Thus, while yellow-bellied sapsuckers winter sparingly in a number of spots in the state, the first real wave of migrant sapsuckers from the south occurs statewide over a brief period, and most spring migrants headed for Canada take only a few days to pass through Ohio. One important deviation from Jones's median dates for Lorain County will be most obvious in southern Ohio, among species that arrive much earlier there to breed—phoebes, gnatcatchers, some of the warblers, for example—and for these

species Jones's Lorain County median arrival dates may be weeks late, though his record early arrivals, probably representing overflights, may be much closer to normal southern Ohio arrivals.

Jones's compilation may be used in many ways, but for our purposes we present it in calendar form rather than taxonomic order. The first date in each entry is the median arrival date as calculated by Jones from 50 years of observations, and then in parenthesis follows the earliest date on which he found each species as a migrant between 1896 and 1945. A number of these species—eastern bluebird, song sparrow, red-winged blackbird, mourning dove, belted kingfisher, eastern towhee, common grackle, American robin, etc.—though they winter widely in Ohio today, were regarded as rare in Lorain County in winter by Jones in the early part of the study period. He apparently made an effort to record only migrants throughout. With his data presented as they are here, we can look forward day by day this coming spring, as an observer during the period 1896-1945 would have, to the most likely date on which each species will show up as a migrant at Lorain's latitude, and compare the extreme early dates on which each occurred there as recorded by Jones.

Not included are species—white-eyed vireo, lark sparrow, worm-eating warbler, etc.—Jones did not see frequently enough in Lorain County to provide comparable data. Some species now common—like double-crested cormorant or ring-billed gull—but very rare in Jones's day do not appear either. Also omitted are birds that wintered in Lorain County—such as siskins, tree sparrows, juncos—but could not easily be distinguished from migrants of these species from further south.

20 February: American crow (2/7/25)

22 February: American robin (2/7/25)

25 February: eastern bluebird (2/7/25)

26 February: song sparrow (2/8/25)

27 February: killdeer (2/8/25)

3 March: red-winged blackbird (2/12/38)

4 March: northern flicker (2/7/15), common grackle (2/6/45),
eastern meadowlark (2/7/19)

6 March: canvasback (2/17/00)

7 March: mourning dove (2/8/27)

8 March: Canada goose (2/8/27&38)

9 March: common merganser (2/22/06)

10 March: American wigeon (2/14/37), American black duck (2/13/38), redhead
(2/13/38)

11 March: mallard (2/13/38)

12 March: brown-headed cowbird (2/13/38)

14 March: rusty blackbird (2/12/38)

15 March: gadwall (2/16/41)

16 March: pintail (2/9/00), green-winged teal (2/16/41), eastern towhee (2/10/39)

20 March: lesser scaup (2/14/37), fox sparrow (3/3/23)

21 March: tundra swan (2/8/38), loggerhead shrike (3/2/19), turkey vulture

- (2/25/32), field sparrow (3/5/45)
 22 March: hooded merganser (3/1/06), American coot (3/4/45), eastern phoebe (3/8/21&36)
 23 March: bufflehead (3/4/39), northern shoveler (3/2/39), great blue heron (2/14/37)
 24 March: greater scaup
 25 March: ring-necked duck (2/16/41), red-breasted merganser (2/21/16), American woodcock (3/4/32), vesper sparrow (3/13/21)
 28 March: Wilson's snipe (3/3/21)
 31 March: pied-billed grebe (2/15/29)
 2 April: chipping sparrow (3/18/45)
 3 April: yellow-bellied sapsucker (3/5/35)
 4 April: blue-winged teal (3/3/25), pectoral sandpiper (3/1/04), hermit thrush (3/12/32)
 7 April: wood duck (3/8/42), ruddy duck (2/24/15), American bittern (3/15/25), purple martin (3/21/43)
 9 April: swamp sparrow (3/13/08)
 10 April: Bonaparte's gull
 11 April: common loon (3/19/97), black-crowned night-heron (3/18/43), tree swallow (3/14/04), upland sandpiper (3/22/04), ruby-crowned kinglet (3/15/45)
 12 April: barn swallow (3/29/42)
 13 April: greater yellowlegs (3/18/32), brown thrasher (3/21/35)
 16 April: Louisiana waterthrush (3/28/04), savannah sparrow (3/21/03), white-throated sparrow (3/14/28)
 18 April: osprey (4/5/34), spotted sandpiper (4/18/45), yellow-rumped warbler (3/16/45)
 19 April: chimney swift (3/19/45)
 20 April: common moorhen (3/30/00)
 21 April: lesser yellowlegs (3/18/99), house wren (3/15/45), grasshopper sparrow (4/4/28)
 22 April: bank swallow (4/6/02)
 23 April: green heron (4/6/13), American golden-plover (3/29/07), blue-gray gnatcatcher (3/29/07), Henslow's sparrow (4/10/15)
 24 April: yellow warbler (4/4/24), northern rough-winged swallow (4/8/29)
 25 April: gray catbird (4/13/38)
 27 April: red-headed woodpecker (4/10/31), marsh wren (4/21/01), bobolink (4/14/44&45)
 28 April: solitary sandpiper (4/8/45), black-and-white warbler (4/30/20), wood thrush (4/3/48), ovenbird (4/19/25)
 29 April: Caspian tern (4/17/38), black-throated green warbler (4/8/45), palm warbler (4/10/22), Baltimore oriole (4/4/43)

- 30 April: sora (4/11/08), Swainson's thrush (3/29/45), warbling vireo (4/17/96), cliff swallow (4/6/31)
 1 May: northern waterthrush (4/16/44), lark sparrow (4/5/42)
 2 May: common tern (4/7/23), Nashville warbler (4/17/35), blue-winged warbler (4/19/14&25), veery (4/3/30), blue-headed vireo (4/17/02), American redstart (4/7/39), white-crowned sparrow (4/12/42)
 3 May: great crested flycatcher (4/17/38), yellow-throated vireo (4/20/14), whip-poor-will (4/18/45)
 4 May: scarlet tanager (4/14/43)
 5 May: least flycatcher (4/11/03), American pipit (4/3/34), cerulean warbler (4/26/42), magnolia warbler (4/19/29), Blackburnian warbler (4/19/42), rose-breasted grosbeak (4/24/21&44)
 6 May: black-throated blue warbler (4/27/96&23), chestnut-sided warbler (4/30/33&42), sedge wren (4/26/25), indigo bunting (4/16/44)
 7 May: black tern (4/27/43), orchard oriole (4/25/96)
 8 May: eastern wood-pewee (4/26/15&42), orange-crowned warbler (4/19/42), golden-winged warbler (5/1/16)
 9 May: king rail (4/19/30), gray-cheeked thrush (4/26/44), pine warbler (4/17/42), yellow-breasted chat (4/25/45), Cape May warbler (4/27/14&25), hooded warbler (4/22/14)
 10 May: bay-breasted warbler (4/29/25), Tennessee warbler (4/30/42), Lincoln's sparrow (4/4/42), prothonotary warbler (4/27/13)
 11 May: least bittern (4/21/25), semipalmated plover (4/24/23), piping plover (4/1/34), ruby-throated hummingbird (4/17/17&38), yellow-billed cuckoo (4/26/15&25), prairie warbler [many Oberlin records] (4/28/99)
 12 May: least sandpiper (4/16/28), Acadian flycatcher (4/26/15), northern parula (4/28/23), Philadelphia vireo (4/23/38), sanderling (4/6/13)
 13 May: black-billed cuckoo (5/1/42), Canada warbler (4/28/96)
 14 May: Kentucky warbler (4/27/04).

Here the spring migration record ends. Median and early arrival dates for later migrants—such as among warblers mourning, Connecticut, Wilson's, and blackpoll—are missing, and one hopes they will someday be found. Other interesting Lorain County records in these papers involve a common redpoll 15 May 1929, a sanderling 10 June 1934, records of Kirtland's warbler 9-11 May 1900 and 9 May 1904 and 2 May 1906, 45 lark sparrows during the span, a Lapland longspur 19 May 1931, a second-hand report of trumpeter swan at Lorain 20 April 1891, 42 greater white-fronted geese 4 November 1907, and a short-eared owl 31 May 1932.

Acknowledgment

Students of Ohio's ornithological history owe a debt to E. & S. Wood of Oberlin, who rescued these and other valuable Jones papers from obscurity. Those from which this article is derived will be donated to the Oberlin Archives at Oberlin College, in whose care are many other Jones materials. ♣