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Further Afield

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Just like clockwork, turkey vultures return to Hinckley, Ohio on precisely March 15 each and every year. And just as reliably, once a year I venture out to my garage, dust off my trusty time machine, and travel back in time at 10-year intervals to sample the Ohio birding scene of days gone by.

For established *Cardinal* readers, the existence of my time machine should by now be a matter of unquestioning certainty and enduring doctrine. Even so, I must admit that an insignificant and presumably envious handful of crabby readers continue to deny its existence, preferring to believe that instead of using a time machine, I actually consult old ornithological journals and history books and web sites to gather my facts. But to these surly readers, and to newcomers to my columns, let me offer reassurance that the existence of my time machine is every bit as dependable and unimpeachable as the regular and punctual return of the buzzards to Hinckley. Right? Right. Good.

It is always something of an adventure just to be able to reach the time machine in my garage, as another year's worth of detritus must first be cleared away to allow access. This year, and for unknown reasons, someone had piled (not one, but three!) croquet sets, a set of lawn darts (unused, and in their original box!), a fine assortment of tiki-themed citronella candles, and even one of those metallic, spheroid gazing balls, complete with pedestal, in front of or atop my precious time machine. Not to be denied, however, I overcame these indignities, brushed off the year's thickness of accumulated stray lawn clippings, sawdust, and desiccated fly carcasses, and filled 'er up with a leftover can full of Sohio's Super Cetron gasoline. So, I'm ready if you are—just remember, the first several stops may be a tad rough and uneven, as our balky conveyance gains its composure. Our first stop is.....

Winter 1875-76

Jack London, author of The Call of the Wild and White Fang, is born on January 12. On January 24, Bat Masterson is badly wounded in a gunfight in Sweetwater, Texas. Competitors Elisha Gray (of Barnesville, Ohio and Oberlin College) and Alexander Graham Bell both apply for the first patents for the telephone on February 14.

As usual, a fogged windshield dims our view of these early stops. Please be patient...there, that's better. Now we can see J.M. Wheaton collecting a lapland longspur in Columbus on February 19. Wheaton doesn't know it at the time, but in the 1940s Alexander Wetmore will identify this specimen (#203070 in the U.S. National Museum) as *Calcarius lapponicus alascensis*, the "Alaskan Longspur," a subspecies of lapland longspur that nests in Alaska and the Yukon Territory, and normally winters in the western U.S. and Great Plains. It may still be the only record

of this form from Ohio, but I'm not sure if anyone's actually looked for another. Onward.....

Winter 1905-06

Howard Hughes (December 24), Henny Youngman (January 12, or perhaps March 16, depending on what you read), Aristotle Onassis (January 15), and Bugsy Siegel (February 28) are born. Not much else happens.

As I feared, our unruly time machine has completely passed by the winters of 1885-86 and 1895-96. My fervent apologies, but at least we land in a relatively calm period. Not so calm, however, for snowy owls, as three of four owls found in Trumbull, Ashtabula, and Mahoning counties are "taken." H. McConnell sees another in Cadiz December 14, this one being kept in a cage after being winged by a farmer. The more tranquil Vermilion River gorge near Brownhelm Mills in Lorain County induces a white-throated sparrow to overwinter, the first such occurrence recorded by veteran birder Lynds Jones.

Winter 1915-16

On December 7, President Woodrow Wilson requests a standing army of 142,000, with 400,000 reserves, as the U.S. heads into The Great War. Albert Einstein publishes his General Theory of Relativity on December 16. Three striking workers are killed, and many more are injured, by company guards at the Youngstown Steel & Tube Co. on January 7.

Despite the troubled times, on December 25 Youngstown birders discover a wood thrush on their Christmas Bird Count. Possibly reflecting both their city and their times, the CBC compiler writes that the thrush "was possibly crippled, but could fly quite well."

Winter 1925-26

Soupy Sales is born on January 8. The newly-invented "television" is demonstrated by John L. Baird in London on January 27. Walt Disney Studios is formed on February 8. The same day, the German Reichstag applies for membership in the League of Nations.

The Wooster birding crew rings up rarities such as a long-eared owl on January 8, an eastern meadowlark on January 17, and a short-eared owl on January 20, but are most pleased with a field sparrow found on January 10, a bird deemed "quite unusual." Two wintering song sparrows are a topic of considerable and grave discussion in Cleveland, where the editor of *The Cleveland Bird Calendar* states that "It will apparently require close observation for several more consecutive years by several different observers...before we shall be prepared to give any definite authoritative opinion on the extent to which the Song Sparrow is becoming a non-migratory [species] in this region and latitude." Not to be outdone, flocks of Canada geese pass over Oberlin on February 11 and 14.

Winter 1935-36

Author Rudyard Kipling dies on January 8. His work The Man Who Would Be King was based on the life of Josiah Harlan, who was the first American in Afghanistan, and who would ultimately be named "Prince of Ghor" by the Hazara people, a title he and his progeny were to hold in perpetuity. Go ahead, look it up. Although actually a distant relative of Josiah Harlan, your friendly columnist Rob Harlan has never sought to reap any benefits from this arrangement; even so, he is keeping his options open. On January 29, the first five members of Baseball's Hall of Fame are named: Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson, Babe Ruth, and Honus Wagner. Fullback Jim Brown, not to be confused with musician James Brown, is born on February 17. Chancellor Adolph Hitler opens Germany's first Volkswagen factory on February 26.

Here we find the Ashtabula CBC of December 27 really hopping, with a glaucous gull, seven great black-backed gulls, and 17 long-tailed ducks all gathering around at a "discharge of heated water." Merit Skaggs discovers Ohio's first wild mute swan to little fanfare in Cleveland on January 26, but Lou Campbell is pleased to kick up 88 northern bobwhites in Toledo on February 23.

Winter 1945-46

Following the May surrender of Germany and the August surrender of Japan, most U.S. wartime rationing has been concluded by this season. On December 27, the U.S., Great Britain, and the Soviet Union agree to divide Korea into two occupation zones. The first General Assembly of the United Nations convenes on January 10. In February, the U.S. War Department announces that it has developed an extremely sophisticated calculator, or "computer," which occupies a room and uses more than 18,000 vacuum tubes.

While others occupy Korea, Milt Trautman occupies an ice-fishing shanty a half-mile west of South Bass Island. On January 20, he watches a soaring, flapping, and croaking common raven for five minutes; on February 24, he identifies an Iceland gull by voice; and two days later he collects Ohio's first Thayer's gull, then considered a race of herring gull, but elevated to full specific status in 1973. At the opposite side of the state, a northern shrike on the Ashtabula CBC December 23 takes the easy way out, preferring to capture gizzard shad entombed in lakeshore drift ice.

Winter 1955-56

Rosa Parks keeps her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus on December 1. On December 6, Dr. Joyce Brothers wins big on the TV quiz show \$64,000 Question by correctly answering seven boxing questions. Truck driver Elvis Presley holds his first RCA recording session on January 5. Tennessee Ernie Ford's Sixteen Tons remains atop the Billboard pop charts for eight weeks. On February 4, teenager George L. Wright III wins \$100,000 on the quiz show The Big Surprise.

Surprisingly, Wright announces his first purchase is expected to be a tippie, a form of ukulele.

A low-key season, apparently. We do note, however, that 16 barn owls are found on eight CBCs, and that loggerhead shrikes outnumber northern shrikes on CBCs four to three. A wintering eared grebe pleases many at Akron's Summit Lake, and a male common eider is spied on Cleveland's lakefront January 14. Nearby, a "noisy flock" of 30 pine grosbeaks infests North Chagrin Reservation on February 12.

Winter 1965-66

Gemini 7 is launched by NASA on December 4. A Charlie Brown Christmas debuts on December 9. On January 7, the U.S. and Australian armies launch Operation CRIMP near Saigon. Batman, starring Adam West and Burt Ward, debuts on January 12. Timely Billboard #1 hits during the period include Turn! Turn! Turn! by the Byrds, We Can Work It Out by the Beatles, and The Sounds of Silence by Simon & Garfunkel.

A very active season everywhere, it seems. Ohio's first black-headed gull is found in Cleveland on December 13. This new arrival is counterbalanced by the 21 gray partridges, a species definitely on its way out, seen on the Utica CBC (Licking and Knox counties) December 23. A flock of 40-45 pine grosbeaks, with a ratio of one adult male to five females/immatures, winters at Holden Arboretum, just east of Cleveland. Oddball warblers seen this season include a Cape May, two ovenbirds, a northern waterthrush, and an adult male Wilson's seen by many in Barnesville December 31-January 12. Somehow reflecting world events, black-capped chickadees stage a major invasion of the south, reaching at least as far as Marietta.

Winter 1975-76

Laos falls to Communist forces on December 3. Sara Jane Moore pleads guilty on December 12, and Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme is sentenced to life in prison on December 17—both had attempted to assassinate President Gerald Ford. Golfer Tiger Woods is born on December 30. Henry Kissinger and Leonid Brezhnev continue to discuss the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II).

Ohio's first (and only) ivory gull stuns observers in Cleveland December 17-19, being seen "at times less than 15 feet from observers." Black-capped chickadees are on the move again, including "[a] great wave...from the north" in Toledo, and outnumbering Carolinas at a Marietta banding station. A rose-breasted grosbeak wintering at a Youngstown feeder is trumped by a black-headed grosbeak wintering at a Cincinnati feeder. Single Bewick's wrens are found at feeders in Summit and Geauga counties on January 13 and February 6. Just as impressive, however, is a pair of house finches wintering at a Cleveland Heights feeder—"identification was confirmed by persons who were familiar with the species and further verified by an examination of skins in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History of all similar species."

Winter 1985-86

Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi threatens to retaliate should the U.S. attack his nation. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is first celebrated as a national holiday on January 20. The explosion of the space shuttle Challenger shocks the world on January 28. Following the Tylenol contamination, Johnson & Johnson announces on February 17 that they will no longer offer drugs for sale in capsules.

Huron steals the show, harboring Ohio's first Pacific loon December 7-10, and Ohio's second mew gull December 7-8. House finches have apparently increased somewhat since 1975, considering the flock of 2000+ seen in a sunflower field in Pickaway County on December 8. Peak gull counts at Eastlake include five Thayer's, 300 great black-backed, and 14 glaucous gulls. The largest long-eared owl roost is located at Killdeer Plains, where 16+ birds are "excessively harassed by thoughtless birders."

Winter 1995-96

On December 14, the Dayton Peace Accords, a peace treaty for Bosnia, which had been negotiated at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, is signed in Paris. The Alta Vista web search engine is debuted on December 15. President Bill Clinton has plenty to handle, including federal government budgetary shutdowns, the Whitewater scandal, various interns, etc. On February 15, the Toronto Globe and Star newspaper announces that pesticides used on fields in Argentina are killing tens of thousands of wintering Swainson's hawks. Princess Diana agrees to divorce Prince Charles on February 28.

Looks like a great winter. Many birders run the northwestern Ohio rarity route, gathering up a gyrfalcon in Paulding County, a Harris's sparrow in Henry County, 17 Brewer's blackbirds in Sandusky County, a wintering northern goshawk at Maumee Bay State Park, and both crossbills and both redpolls at Woodlawn Cemetery in Toledo. For larophiles, Thayer's gulls are found at four sites, Iceland gulls at eight sites, and lesser black-backed and glaucous gulls at nine sites each. All are eclipsed, however, when Rob Harlan discovers a wintering varied thrush at Nathan Hale Park in Parma Heights on January 23. Seen by tens of grateful birders, Harlan is later awarded the prestigious "Parma Heights Birder of the Century" citation at the annual Parma Heights and Vicinity Ornithological Congress. Plans to reinstate Harlan to his rightful position as "Prince of Ghor" have yet to come to fruition, however.

Winter 2005-06

I'll bet Bill Whan knows what has been seen in this current season. Seek his wisdom.

Winter 2015-16

Wintering warblers continue to increase. Gulls continue to frustrate. Winter finches continue to tantalize. The "Prince of Ghor" continues to pen breathtakingly poignant, yet tastefully understated birding columns from his self-imposed exile in northeastern Ohio.