

# SEASON OVERVIEW

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Once again, Mother Nature made birding challenging this spring. After a slow start in March, with below-average temperatures from Cincinnati through Columbus to Cleveland, the heat lamps were suddenly cranked on and warm temperatures hit with a rush. By the second week of March, 60°-plus temperatures were popping up around the state—including Columbus, with four days that were over 60° Fahrenheit, more than 20 degrees above average. Cincinnati recorded 16 days above 60° in the last three weeks of March, including 73° on 31 March. The temperatures didn't let off as we progressed into April: in the first two weeks, Cincinnati had six days of 80°-plus weather and Columbus and Cleveland had three, with Cincinnati recording 21 days of above-average temperatures for the month. A sudden cooling off, including night-time lows in the 30s from Cincinnati to

Cleveland, during the last week of April lead into a gloomy May. Cincinnati recorded only five sunny days in the first 18 days of May, Cleveland had measurable rainfall 11 of the first 18 days, and Columbus had only four sunny days in the first 23 days of the month. This erratic weather made finding birds a challenge. The trees, responding to early warm temperatures, began budding earlier than usual, so by the time the warblers were making their push through the state in late April and early May, most trees were completely leafed out. Even typically late-leafing species such as oaks and walnuts, favorites of birders hoping for a glimpse of our migrants in the green sea of vegetation, had leafed by early May, making locating vireos, warblers, and flycatchers a challenge. The wet, overcast conditions during the first couple of weeks of May only compounded the difficulty in locating birds. Despite

the challenges, 12 review species were found during this period—some of which we are beginning to expect annually, such as Eurasian Collared-Dove (including nesting documentation), Black-necked Stilt, Glossy Ibis, Eared Grebe, and Kirtland's Warbler. But the appearance of a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Hamilton County, a Pacific Loon in Warren County, and no less than 11 Purple Gallinules (eight from a documented nest in Richland County) certainly were a surprise. Feeders were also important in bringing in rarities: a female Spotted Towhee frequented a Holmes County feeder long enough for over 340 birders to enjoy her, and the Golden-crowned Sparrow again wintered at its feeder in Hancock County through at least 18 April. The often-hoped-for but rarely encountered Smith's Longspurs made a brief visit to Killdeer Plains WA in late April. Similarly, many birders had the rare opportunity to see a breeding plumage Ruff, complete with his black mane, at Big Island WA 26 April through 1 May in Marion County.

Waterfowl diversity was average this spring, with

considerably lower numbers of individuals noted for most species compared with recent years. This might be due in part to the warm early-spring temperatures melting ice and allowing birds to make quick progress north, eliminating the large aggregations of birds typically found just behind the freeze-line as it progresses northward through the state. Only single individuals of Greater White-fronted, Ross's, and Cackling Geese were reported throughout the state, with only scattered reports of individual Snow Geese and a high count of 24 reported at Ottawa on 7 March. Six Eurasian Wigeons and the 86 Long-tailed Ducks reported took some of the sting out of otherwise lackluster waterfowl numbers around the state. Due possibly to the rain and poor field conditions during the prime migration window in the first couple of weeks of May, warbler and sparrow diversity and numbers appeared uninspiring this spring. Little was found that was unexpected, and overall numbers were low.