

THE BIG DAY
1981

Taking a clue from last year's new Ohio big day record of 166 species set by the "Kemp group," the "Bartlett group" reversed its course and started in the north this year and worked south establishing a new Ohio record of 179 species.

The timing was right. The day, May 9, subsequently turned out to be the only major flight day of the year. Two other "days," May 4th and May 15th and 16th had significant movements in retrospect but they were minor in comparison. This migration pattern also restricted the big day attempts to two groups: Bartlett et al and Cairo et al (the "Kemp group" did not mobilize until June 1st but still saw 160+ species on that day in the Toledo area, thus claiming the big day record for June in Ohio.)

Big days received official recognition in 1971 when they were sanctioned by the American Birding Association. Sanctioned because the ABA published rules to standardize the event nationwide (and now worldwide). The object is for a team of observers to see as many species in one day as possible. Not too scientific perhaps but challenging and lots of fun. The birds may be seen, or heard, and most, to conserve time, must be heard. The count can be held during any single 24-hour period during the year but must be on a single calendar day. In fact, most Ohio counts must be timed to occur during a peak May migration day to insure a high count. The participants must remain within direct voice contact of each other during all travel and must travel in the same vehicle if motorized. There must be two or more participants on each count to qualify for a record and the total number of species recorded must have been recorded by at least 95% of the participants. The results are published each year in the ABA journal: Birding. Records are kept for geographical areas (basically states) on a monthly and yearly basis.

Elliot Tramer, an additional member of the "Kemp group," notes that big days are possible around western Lake Erie anytime from late March to late October. They had counts in the 130's in June and July and 107 on August 23 when they missed many of the common passerines.

Tom Bartlett, Bruce Peterjohn,
Don Tumblin, Ed Pierce
May 9, 1981 179 Species

The group assembled the night before at Tom's house in Tiffin (the eye of the migration storm) with the usual anticipation of a good Spring day. Sleep ended at 2:45 A.M. and our first bird, a killdeer, was heard at 3:00 A.M. flying over the house as we entered the car. Tom redeemed himself by actually producing a barred owl before we left Seneca county, a bird unrecorded in our 1980 big day. We would later hear a second one (at dusk) 200 miles to the south in Tar Hollow State Park.

Our decision to move the day to an earlier date to catch the earlier migrants and to start in the northern part of Ohio rather than southern produced a record count. Unexpectedly, a big day is not built on varieties. Ours were only a sandhill crane, snowy egret, yellow-crowned night heron, Connecticut warbler and western meadowlark. To illustrate,

we wouldn't have needed these birds if we had seen a black duck, red-headed woodpecker, cedar waxwing, Wilson's warbler or a harrier.

Luck is important. A night time roadside call of nature for Don produced a screech owl calling (unrecorded for Don, apparently muffled by his own noise). A fortuitous glance overhead while on the Crane Creek bird trail produced a yellow-crowned night heron flying directly behind a black-crowned night heron. Bruce's quick eyes found for us all (and everyone on the bird trail) a Connecticut warbler walking through the leaves on the ground.

Time and habitat are the critical factors. We had 150 species by 1:00 P.M. when we left Huron for the south. The remaining eight hours produced twenty-nine birds (acadian flycatcher, ruffed grouse, whip-poor-will, pileated, red-bellied, and hairy woodpeckers, Carolina chickadee, mockingbird, Louisiana waterthrush, orchard oriole, prairie, pine, worm-eating, yellow-throated and Kentucky warblers, summer tanager, Henslow's and grasshopper sparrows, all of which are easier and therefore less time consuming to see in the south.)

The statistics were: 438 miles by car and 7 miles by foot; 19 hours and 56 minutes in the field; 97.8% of the 179 species were recorded by all four group members.

Is 200 possible? Who knows. 190 is reachable if the combination of early migrants and late migrants are compressed by a late spring and good early May movement. We would have needed black duck, ring-necked duck, common goldeneye, bufflehead, any merganser, yellow-headed sapsucker, brown creeper, winter wren, golden-crowned kinglet, dark-eyed junco, tree and fox sparrows. 200 would require an additional ten of the birds we missed: least and American bittern, red-shouldered hawk, harrier, golden plover, ruddy turnstone, white-rumped sandpiper, short-eared owl, red-headed woodpecker, willow flycatcher, cliff swallow, cedar waxwing, prothonotary and Wilson's warblers and pine siskin.

The complete list of species seen or heard is listed below: common loon, pied-billed grebe, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, green heron, cattle egret, great egret, snowy egret, black-crowned night heron, yellow-crowned night heron, Canada goose, mallard, gadwall, pintail, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, American wigeon, northern shoveler, wood duck, redhead, canvasback, lesser scaup, ruddy duck, turkey vulture, sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, broad-winged hawk, American bald eagle, osprey, American kestrel, ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, sandhill crane, Virginia rail, sora, common gallinule, American coot, semipalmated plover, killdeer, black-bellied plover, American woodcock, common snipe, spotted sandpiper, solitary sandpiper, greater and lesser yellowlegs, pectoral and least sandpipers, dunlin, short-billed dowitcher, semipalmated sandpiper, great black-backed, herring, ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls, Forster's, common, caspian and black terns, rock and mourning doves, yellow-billed and black-billed cuckoos, screech, great-horned and barred owls, whip-poor-will, common nighthawk, chimney swift, ruby-throated hummingbird, belted kingfisher, common flicker, pileated, red-bellied, hairy and downy woodpeckers, eastern kingbird, great-crested flycatcher, eastern phoebe, acadian flycatcher, least flycatcher, eastern wood pewee, horned lark, tree, bank, rough-winged and barn swallows, purple martin, blue jay, common crow, black-capped chickadee, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, house wren, marsh and sedge wrens, mockingbird, gray catbird, brown thrasher, American robin, wood, hermit, Swainson's and gray-cheeked

thrushes, veery, eastern bluebird, blue-gray gnatcatcher, ruby-crowned kinglet, water pipit, starling, white-eyed, yellow-throated, solitary, red-eyed, Philadelphia, and warbling vireos, black and white, worm-eating, golden-winged, blue-winged, Tennessee, and Nashville warblers, northern parula, yellow, magnolia, Cape May, black-throated blue, yellow-rumped, black-throated green, cerulean, blackburnian, yellow-throated, chestnut-sided, bay-breasted, blackpoll, pine, prairie and palm warblers, ovenbird, northern and Louisiana waterthrushes. Kentucky and Connecticut warblers, common yellowthroat, yellow-breasted chat, hooded and Canada warblers, American redstart, house sparrow, bobolink, eastern and western meadowlarks, red-winged blackbirds, northern and orchard orioles, rusty blackbird, common grackle, brown-headed cowbird, scarlet and summer tanagers. cardinal, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting, purple finch, American goldfinch, rufous-sided towhee, Savannah, grasshopper, Henslow's, vesper, chipping, field, white-crowned, white-throated, Lincoln's, swamp and song sparrows.

Jerry Cairo, Chuck Hocevar,
Dave Corbin, Howard Besser
May 15, 1981 167 species

We also started in the north for the first time and improved our count total from 1980 by 14 species. We started at Touissant for marsh birds of the night. We went to Irwin Prairie and Oak Openings and then to Magee and Ottawa. It was a non-wave day so the bird trail took too much of our time (2½ hours). That threw our time schedule way off. We then went to Huron Pier and then headed for southern Ohio. We briefly stopped at Pickerington Marsh and then headed on down to Clearcreek and only had 45 minutes to cover it. Upon leaving Clearcreek it was 7:00 and we had 164 species. We then went down to Adams County which was a mistake because we arrived as it was getting dark and only added grasshopper sparrow, whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow. I believe if we would have stayed at Clearcreek for the final 1½ hours we would have had at least 170. Our final total was 167. It is a high total but when you consider the area traveled I don't really consider it to be that good. We still believe Adams County can be included in a big day but leaving northern Ohio earlier is critical and also Clearcreek has to be replaced with a comparable area more in line with Adams County.

In total, we tallied: 13 ducks, 7 hawks, 14 shorebirds, 3 owls, 4 woodpeckers, 7 flycatchers, 5 vireos, 31 warblers, 6 blackbirds, 4 finches and 10 sparrows. Our noteworthy species were: yellow-crowned night heron, bufflehead, black vulture, upland sandpiper, western sandpiper, Forster's tern, barred owl, Carolina wren, orange-crowned warbler and mourning warbler.