

Birding the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area

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The purpose of this article is to shed light on the opportunity one might have in birding a portion of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (hereafter referred to as CVNRA). Obviously, it would be a ponderous task to detail the entire CVNRA in this article, thus the intent is to give the reader an idea of what birds might be found and classified as specific to a small cross-section of the park. Also, this article would like to portray a number of exciting accidental and migrant species which have been seen in the area in recent spring and summer seasons, hopefully demonstrating the attraction the area has as a birding oasis.

The area of the park that is to be described can be divided into four unique and yet geographically close niches that are easily accessible from either Riverview or Akron-Peninsula Roads, which in turn both intersect State Route 303 in the Village of Peninsula. These areas are known to this author as the following:

- (1) "Beaver Pond"
- (2) Horseshoe Pond
- (3) Deep Lock Quarry
- (4) Virginia Kendall Ledges

While these areas all have their proximity to the Cuyahoga River as a common feature, they also have some distinct characteristics that are noteworthy to the discerning birder.

Due to the fact that the greater part of this author's observations were done from March to June of 1985, the article is intended to portray this area's attractiveness to both residents and migrants. Therefore, the information supplied in this article is meant as general reference and nesting documentation is to be regarded in terms of "possible breeding" or "probable breeding" as defined in the "Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas Instruction Manual, 1983-1987." Due to the enormous amount of field study required to meet the manual's "confirmed breeding" criteria, the author would rather make this area's attraction to birds in general a priority, at the same time respecting the need for more data to meet the manual's criteria.

- (1) "Beaver Pond"

This area possibly exemplifies the most remarkable change in habitat that the new federal park offers. Formerly the sight of an automobile repair shop, the recent activity of a beaver family has engineered a small marsh among cat-tails and shrubby fields, which

in turn has made it more attractive to a plethora of birds in both volume and variation.

This small wetland straddles the old Ohio Canal and is easily accessible by the former canal's towpath at the intersection of Riverview and Ira Roads. There is also ample space for viewing directly west of the pond along Riverview Road. Recent observations by the author and others concludes the following species are indicative of the area:

Canada Goose (goslings observed)	Willow Flycatcher
Mallard (ducklings observed)	Barn Swallow
Wood Duck (ducklings observed)	Tree Swallow (nesting observed)
Great Blue Heron	Rough-winged Swallow
Green-backed Heron	Bank Swallow
Virginia Rail	Marsh Wren
Spotted Sandpiper	Eastern Bluebird
American Woodcock	Blue-winged Warbler
Common Snipe	Common Yellowthroat
Belted Kingfisher	Field Sparrow
Eastern Kingbird	Swamp Sparrow
Eastern Phoebe	

These species are fairly descriptive to the area and are common through the spring and summer seasons. In addition to the above species though, the following attractions were observed this year:

Pied-billed Grebe	Great Egret
American Black Duck	Least Bittern
Blue-winged Teal	American Bittern
American Wigeon	

In addition to the characteristic and uncommon birds noted above, the author has observed a variety of migratory birds over and above what has been listed, such as kinglets, warblers, and sparrows. More common residents also make this area home as they do the rest of the CVNRA. The priority in this article is to focus on differing habitats and their attraction with respect to the other niches depicted in this article.

In late March and early April, the author and others observed hundreds of ducks moving over the area at dusk (almost 7:30 to be exact). Most of these were black ducks, mallards, wigeon, and teal. Although most of the ducks lit on or near the pond, the black ducks preferred the river (100 yards to the east). During this same time frame, the observer should listen for the PEENT! of the woodcock and the snipe winnowing. Virginia rail can be heard grunting among the cat-tails about the pond. The amount of swallows flying over the pond is a spectacle at this time of year. Common raptors include turkey vulture, red-

tailed hawk, kestrel, and great-horned owl. The wetter areas in the vicinity of the pond, both north and south along Riverview Road, have traditionally been reliable for orchard oriole.

The observer should check out the quarry area directly west of the "Beaver Pond" and Riverview Road. This winter a northern shrike wintered this quarry area. Also, this observer saw pairs of scarlet tanagers, kingbirds, and colonies of bank swallows around the quarry perimeter this spring.

(2) Horseshoe Pond

This small niche of the CVNRA lying at the northwest corner of Riverview and Major Roads is a former Christmas Tree farm that has an unique attraction for species that thrive in pastures, brushy tangles, and small pines. Some taller pines interspersed with deciduous stands also make this area a natural oasis for raptors. A small "U" shaped pond lends the area its name, and the pond's run-off forms a small creek providing water and habitat for a variety of species. White-tailed deer are permanent residents of this area.

Access to Horseshoe Pond may be made off Major Road approximately one mile west of the intersection of Major and Riverview Roads. A small lot at this location affords the observer a conventional place to park. Due to the fact that this area can be very dense in tangles and brush, many birders park to the side of Major Road and walk the lengths in both directions without challenging the thickets.

Recent observations by the author have concluded that the following species are indicative of the area:

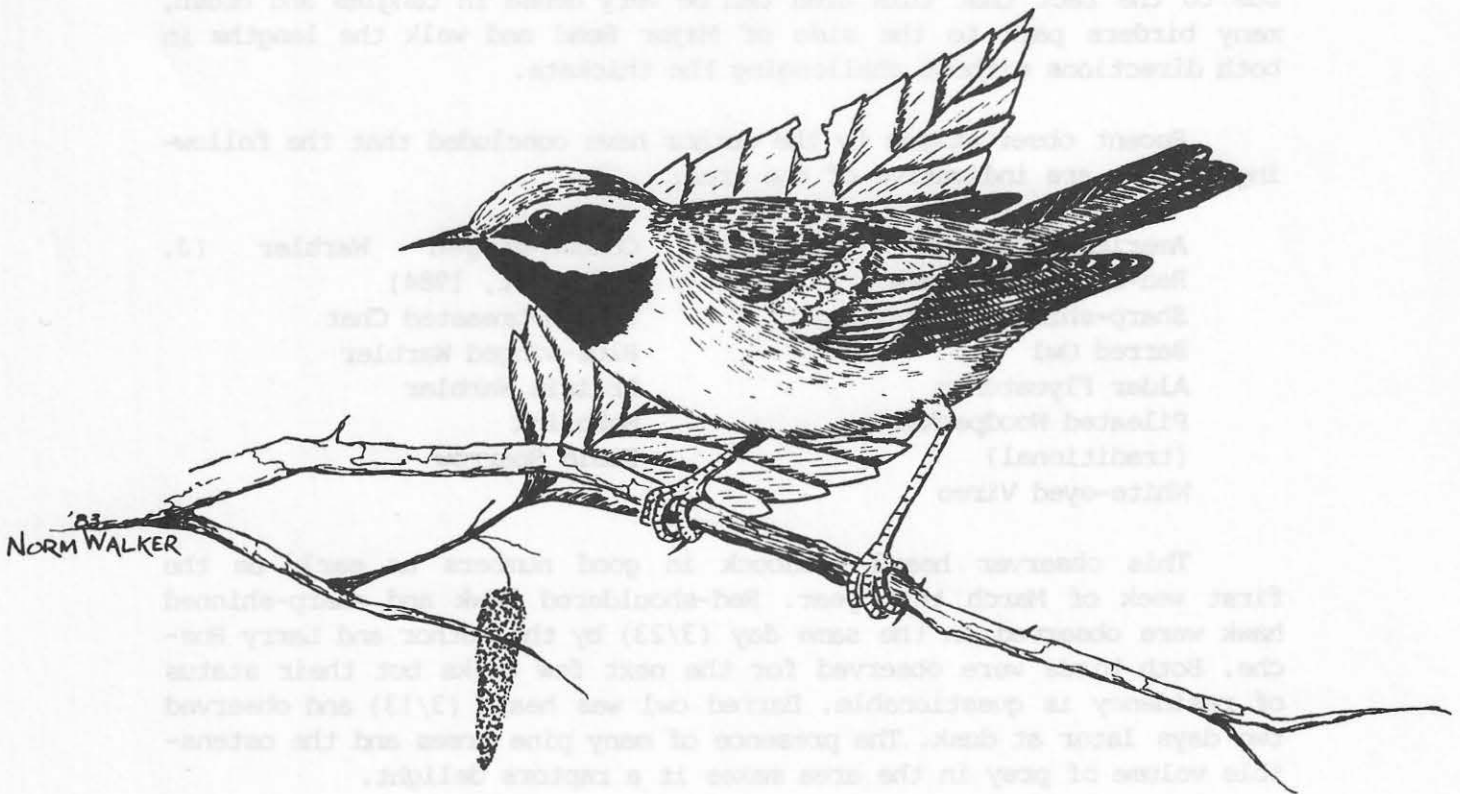
American Woodcock	Golden-winged Warbler (J. & M. Wert, 1984)
Red-shouldered Hawk	Yellow-breasted Chat
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Blue-winged Warbler
Barred Owl	Prairie Warbler
Alder Flycatcher	Bobolink
Pileated Woodpecker	Field Sparrow
(traditional)	
White-eyed Vireo	

This observer heard woodcock in good numbers as early as the first week of March this year. Red-shouldered hawk and sharp-shinned hawk were observed on the same day (3/23) by the author and Larry Rosche. Both birds were observed for the next few weeks but their status of residency is questionable. Barred owl was heard (3/13) and observed two days later at dusk. The presence of many pine trees and the ostensible volume of prey in the area makes it a raptors delight.

The main attraction of Horseshoe Pond has been and continues to be the prairie warblers. Nesting has been documented in the past and due to their ostentatious song they are easily observed in late April and throughout May. Bobolinks have also been observed traditionally at Horseshoe, although their numbers vary yearly and were somewhat scarce this year. By walking Major Road the observer should be able to hear and see white-eyed vireos and chats in the larger bushes. Blue-winged warblers are very prevalent here, and the possibility of a golden-winged seems heightened (last observation was 1984). Although one would not think this area to be conducive to the pileated woodpecker, numerous sightings the past few years make the possibility of its observation unsurprising. Juncos were observed in the pines around the pond in the last week of April this year.

(3) Deep Lock Quarry

Probably the most frequented area of the four by birders, Deep Lock Quarry is easily accessible from its entrance off Riverview Road just a few yards south of Major Road. Because it has been and continues to be a part of the Akron Municipal Park System, it contains a network of established trails that allow for unencumbered access to its denser areas.



This author would like to describe Deep Lock Quarry as a mesic deciduous woodland, however, due to its proximity to the Cuyahoga River, the woods slope down into a steep river valley, creating an environmental gradient where the changing altitude and flora allow for differing habitats conducive to many birds.

Probably the best way to describe Deep Lock's attraction as a birding spot would be by its landmarks, both natural and man-made. The upper altitudes of the park contain trails leading into and around an old sandstone quarry from which the park takes its name. Midway down the park's slopes and closer to the river is an old lock where the Ohio Canal once passed and, perpendicular to this, are railroad tracks which this observer has found to be a very good observation area. Lastly, there are trails which follow the river north, and a towpath that runs south along the old canal, past cornfields and a wooded margin.

The following species are indicative of Deep Lock Quarry and are most likely found near their respective landmarks:

(A) Upper Trails and Quarry Area

Northern Bobwhite	Veery
Broad-winged Hawk	Black-capped Chickadee
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	White-breasted Nuthatch
Black-billed Cuckoo	Tufted Titmouse
Downy Woodpecker	Red-eyed Vireo
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Hooded Warbler
Acadian Flycatcher	American Redstart
Willow Flycatcher	Rufous-sided Towhee
Wood Thrush	Chipping Sparrow

This area has taller deciduous trees with some pines. The forest floor is filled with sparse undergrowth and ravines.

(B) Lock Area and Railroad Tracks Near Bridge

Ruffed Grouse
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (nesting activity observed)
Yellow-throated Vireo
Cerulean Warbler (nesting activity observed)
Yellow-throated Warbler (recent nests, none observed 1985)

This area is one of increasing humidity, lower canopy, and denser undergrowth. Stagnant water in old lock is home to many insects and thus, good for warblers during spring. Sycamores along railroad tracks have been specific for gnatcatchers and cerulean warblers.

(C) River Trails and Towpath East of Tracks

Canada Goose	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Mallard	Tree Swallow
Wood Duck	Rough-winged Swallow
Blue-winged Teal	Cedar Waxwing
Great-blue Heron	Blue-winged Warbler
Green-backed Heron	Common Yellowthroat
Killdeer	Yellow Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Red-winged Blackbird
Red-tailed Hawk	Northern Oriole
American Kestrel	Scarlet Tanager
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Indigo Bunting
Belted Kingfisher	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Northern Flicker	

This area allows for direct access to water, dense undergrowth, and many insects. Cornfields east of towpath are a haven for doves, cardinals, and blackbirds. River margin specific for geese, ducks, swallows, and herons.

Obviously there is a crossover between these areas by different species but once again, this article is trying to portray species attraction by habitat. The author feels that the landmarks and their respective species mentioned above are the best bets for observation by the reader.

Noteworthy occurrences at Deep Lock include the presence of broad-winged hawk and turkey vulture each year. This area is always reliable for cerulian warbler and yellow-throated vireo along the railroad tracks near the bridge. Phoebes have nested under that same bridge every year in the author's experience. The upper trails are noted for nesting hooded warblers and American redstarts.

Deep Lock Quarry has been and still is a special attraction for warbler migration. The author observed a large movement of yellow-rumped warblers as early as April 3rd of this year. A short walk along the upper trails and railroad tracks in May should net the casual observer twenty to twenty-five species, including mourning warbler and, in recent years, yellow-throated warbler.

(4) Virginia Kendall Ledges

Virginia Kendall Park lies east of Akron-Peninsula Road between Wetmore Road and State Route 303. This area of the CVNRA is the only area in this article lying on the east side of the river valley. The ledges area of the park can be found off Truxell Road, which runs east and west through the outer area of the park and has a well developed network of trails for easy access.

The ledges area has been chosen for this article specifically for its unique habitat. Containing rock ledges of sandstone conglomerate, the cool atmosphere and deep ravines of the ledges allow for mixed stands of deciduous trees and hemlock. It is the combination of these features that make the area conducive to the following species:

Ruffed Grouse
Hermit Thrush
Solitary Vireo

Black-throated Green Warbler
Ovenbird

The presence of numerous hemlocks at the ledges of Virginia Kendall is the ostensible attraction to the above species. The solitary vireo, hermit thrush, and black-throated green warbler nest in Ohio, preferably in "hemlock habitats" or "hemlock forests," according to the "Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas Instruction Manual 1983-1987." Saw-whet owls and red-breasted nuthatches have also been casual visitors to the area (1981), although none were observed this year. Lastly, ruffed grouse have endured throughout the whole of Virginia Kendall Park, and are consistently observed at the Kendall Lake area across the road from the ledges.

Summary and Acknowledgement

Without further explanation, in 1985 this observer has seen over 150 species of birds in the spring-summer season of the four areas cited in this article. There is no doubt in my mind that 200 species may be observed in the CVNRA in one year. What this means to the Ohio birder is that the CVNRA offers one of the better locations for inland birding in the state.

The author would like to acknowledge the help of Jeff and Missy Wert, Larry Rosche, and Ed Pierce for their input and assistance. Also, the "Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas Instruction Manual, 1983-1987" was most helpful in correlating and supporting information collected in the field regarding the specific areas cited in this article.

Bibliography

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