



WETLAND *matters*

Published bi-monthly for the Friends and Members of Oxbow, Inc.

Birdathon results

Originally Birdathon was organized by Oxbow as a fund raising event. In the last two years, the Cincinnati Nature Center has taken over running the event. But Birdathon is still a fundraiser for environmental organizations in the tri-state area. Organizations (such as Oxbow, Inc.) enter teams in Birdathon and then solicit pledges of money for each species of bird found by their teams.

This year Oxbow entered three teams in Birdathon. The Fire and Brimstone Birder's Guild won the competition by finding 143 species of birds --- more than any other team. Geriatric Gents and a Junior found 89 species, and the No See Ums found 134.

Members who pledged support for one or more of the team's will soon receive a detailed account of the teams adventures. But elsewhere in this Wetland Matters you will find an account of the experiences of the No See Ums, as told by Charlie Saunders.

Thank You

Oxbow is grateful for generous grants from the

William P. Anderson Foundation

and from the

Bassett Family Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation.

Calendar

Field trips

Thursday July 26, 2001 6:00 P.M. Oxbow field trip

Meet Connie McNamee and Greg Mendell at Gardens Alive! for a summer evening's walk into the Oxbow. There might be a few bugs (bring some repellent) but you won't want to miss this trip. Connie and Greg's appreciation of the natural world and love of the Oxbow is contagious.

Saturday August 25, 2001/ 8:00 A.M. Oxbow field trip

Master birder Ned Keller will lead this trip into the Oxbow area starting from the Gardens Alive! parking lot. There should be migrant shorebirds present as well as the young of locally breeding birds. Ned will help you spot them, identify them, and learn about them.

Programs

10 July 2001, Tuesday 7:30 P.M. Oxbow meeting at the Cincinnati Zoo's Education Building

Suzanne and David Skidmore, world travelers and long-time Oxbow supporters, will take us on vacation, via slides, to some of our National Parks.

14 August 2001 Tuesday 7:30 P.M. Oxbow meeting at the Lawrenceburg Public Library

This evening's program will be given by Al Winstel, a naturalist with the Hamilton County Parks. Al's program will include showing us some live animals. It's only a guess, but considering Al's interests, some of these animals will probably be reptiles.

Wild Turkey: The Attack of the Killer Turkeys David Styer

Wild Turkeys are becoming so common that it is an eye opener to read accounts written in the first half of the twentieth century. The accounts spend much time quoting authors from the nineteenth century, who clearly had much more experience with the wild turkey. Bruce Peterjohn states, in *The Birds of Ohio*, that "wild turkeys were almost certainly extirpated from Ohio before 1900." By 1930 the only population left in Kentucky was in the vicinity of the Land Between the Lakes (see Monroe, *The Birds of Kentucky*). Russell Mumford and Charles Keller write, in *The Birds of Indiana*, that "few, if any, wild birds survived after the early 1920s." Reintroduction efforts in the second half of the twentieth century have been very successful, and now wild turkeys are almost regular in the Oxbow area. Last winter a flock roosted in trees along Lawrenceburg Road just down river from Lost Bridge.

This article will relate an experience about self-defense in wild turkeys. OK, the title is a bit exaggerated, but the incident happened in California. A little of Hollywood is rubbing off, but only in the title. The classic bird method of defense is flight. This appears to be so well understood that it is often by-passed as obvious. I searched the indices of four general ornithology books, and only Pettingill's *Ornithology* led me to a general discussion of defense, including flight. Defense of young is frequently mentioned. I have personally experienced nesting Caspian terns flying right at me and giving a loud scream as they get close, and then flying just over my head. That is intimidating, believe me. Territorial defense is thoroughly discussed, but it is largely a different issue.

On 25 February I was on Ft. Ord, California preparing to take Bureau of Land Management botanists Bruce Delgado and Julie Ann Hamon and her two nieces on a bird walk. Near the meeting place I came upon a flock of wild turkeys. The males were displaying nicely with their tail feathers fanned out, so I decided to pick up the group and start the walk at the wild turkey location. When we got there the turkeys had moved on. We went slowly down the road until someone noticed the flock. They were walking along, twenty females in the lead and four males bringing up the rear. The males were displaying, but not to the extent that they had been earlier, when I literally had to drive around them.

Suddenly the lead birds jumped into the air, and there seemed to be a general disturbance, even among other birds. I didn't know what was happening until Bruce said "there's a bobcat." We shifted our attention to the bobcat among the turkeys, and we saw a surprising thing. Three or four of the leading females lined up side-by-side, and walked together and deliberately toward the bobcat. The turkeys' heads were stretched out straight, pointing at the bobcat. To all of us, bobcat included, this appeared to be a threatening action. The bobcat turned away, but the turkeys continued their deliberate march toward it. Finally, the bobcat left, driven off by the hen turkeys.

After that the turkeys proceeded, crossing the road in front of us. When the males, bringing up the rear, came to the road, they appeared to challenge our car, but eventually wandered off, following the females.

In reading several accounts about wild turkeys I read nothing explicit about aggressive and cooperative self defense. The closest to this is a suggestive sentence in Audubon's extensive account. "Several hens sometimes associate together, I believe for their mutual safety, deposit their eggs in the same nest, and rear their broods together." The wild turkey is not native to California. Perhaps these introduced birds just wanted to show us that a little Hollywood could rub off on them, too.

Field Notes

Morris Mercer

This is a warm evening in May. While the hard rain is over, drops still drip from the trees. The rain was welcome as this has been a dry spring. We haven't had any high water this year. I had hoped we would have high water when the migrating waterfowl were moving north. The only large flocks I saw were in February. We missed seeing a lot of waterfowl, but it has been a great spring here in the valley of the three rivers.

It was so good to watch the woods and the roadsides come alive with the foliage. The Redbuds were extra nice this year, and as the Buckeye leaves began to unfold their blossoms looked like candles covering the branches. The blossoms on the Papaw reminded me of little lanterns and May Apples came up and unfolded like little umbrellas as the floor of the woods greened up. As the Redbud began to fade the dogwood came into full bloom adding to the beauty of the woods.

A stop at Lost Bridge confirmed that the Cliff Swallows had returned. The Swallows were busy as they carried mud for their new nests. The Great Horned Owl's young is good sized now and shows up above the edge of the nest. The Red-tailed Hawk is on its nest, but I haven't seen any young yet.

One evening I made a trip along the Great Miami under a blue sky and with a gentle breeze out of the southwest. Against the fresh green of spring, the Locust trees stood out, all dressed up in white. Each year when the Locusts are in bloom I'm surprised at their great number. They're only conspicuous for a short time, but Locusts in full bloom are beautiful and their fragrance is haunting. The sweet perfume, the warm breeze, and the voice of the Wood Thrush made it another evening to remember.

Darlana Graham was leading an Oxbow field trip one morning and I knew I couldn't make the walk. I drove in the back way and made my first stop at Jack-Pot Pond. I was greeted by the resounding cry of an Osprey perched on a branch in a tall Cottonwood. I caught up with the field trip, and got to see several people I know. Darlena said they had encountered some shorebirds and had also seen the Osprey.

On another trip to the Oxbow, on a very warm evening in May, I noticed the Blackberries were in bloom, I thought of years gone by and how it seemed so many times the weather was cold while the blackberries were in bloom. We always called it "Blackberry winter." But today it was very warm for May. At

the Oxbow I saw a number of Double-crested Cormorants. Several stood on stumps just above the water and others perched higher, drying their wings. There were also a good many Great Egrets showing off their snow white plumage in the new spring green of the Willows.

One day at the Oxbow the air was full of Cottonwood seeds. At times it looked like a snow storm. At the secluded water hole back on Wood Duck Slough, the surface of the water was covered with the white of Cottonwood. A hen Wood Duck took a line of little woodies on a cruise across the water hole. A Prothonotary Warbler was busy in the trees just above the water. "What a great spring day," I thought. Life is good.

Seeing all the Cottonwood blossoms brought back the memories of a kid in Illinois. This time of year was a great time for fishing. I can still picture the Cottonwood blossoms on the lazy river. My dad, brother and so many of our old gang enjoyed those days on the river, but we had no idea what was just ahead. As Memorial Day comes closer I think of that old gang of mine often. I think, too, of an even older song. Some of the words were "The wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine." But it was the bugle call of WW II that broke up that old gang of ours. We were sent all over the world, and so many didn't come home. I think of them on these spring days.

I also look to the future. Oxbow, Inc. now owns the Beaver Pond, and will soon own much of the land near the Greendale levee as well. The Peregrine Falcon has had a successful nest this year in the box on the stack at the CG&E power plant. Soon it will be my joy to watch those masters of the sky as they fly around the Oxbow area. There are many beautiful things in the valley of the three rivers that I enjoy and am thankful for. Summer is near and I'm sure it will be good... but the beauty of this spring will be hard to beat.



Oxbow Memorials

Donor

Audrey C. Barth
Daniel Brown
Kelly and John Diehl
Virginia Hamilton
Jeanne Jaspers
Karl Maslowski
Grant Starrett
Richard and Aileen Starrett
University of New Mexico
Department of Pathology
Gary and Susan Winters
Jinny Wiseman Witte
Jane and Roy Bernzott
Bob and Tina Schlegel
Cincinnati Incorporated
Cincinnati Shaper Independent Union
Nell Vosmer and Suzanne Skidmore
Oak Crest Animal Hospital
Cheryl L. Devine D.V.M.

In memory of

Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Bill Bocklage
Dale Bradford
Marian Fulmer
Mack J. Hixson
Mack J. Hixson
Lucille Meyers
Keeley Wagner

Oxbow, Inc. has established Memorials in honor of those who have passed on. Each Memorial, established in the name of a friend or loved one, will be enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Each contribution to a Memorial will be acknowledged to the family or to those selected by the donor. Contributions should be sent to Oxbow, Inc., P.O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45243-0391. Be sure to include the names and address of those to receive the acknowledgement.

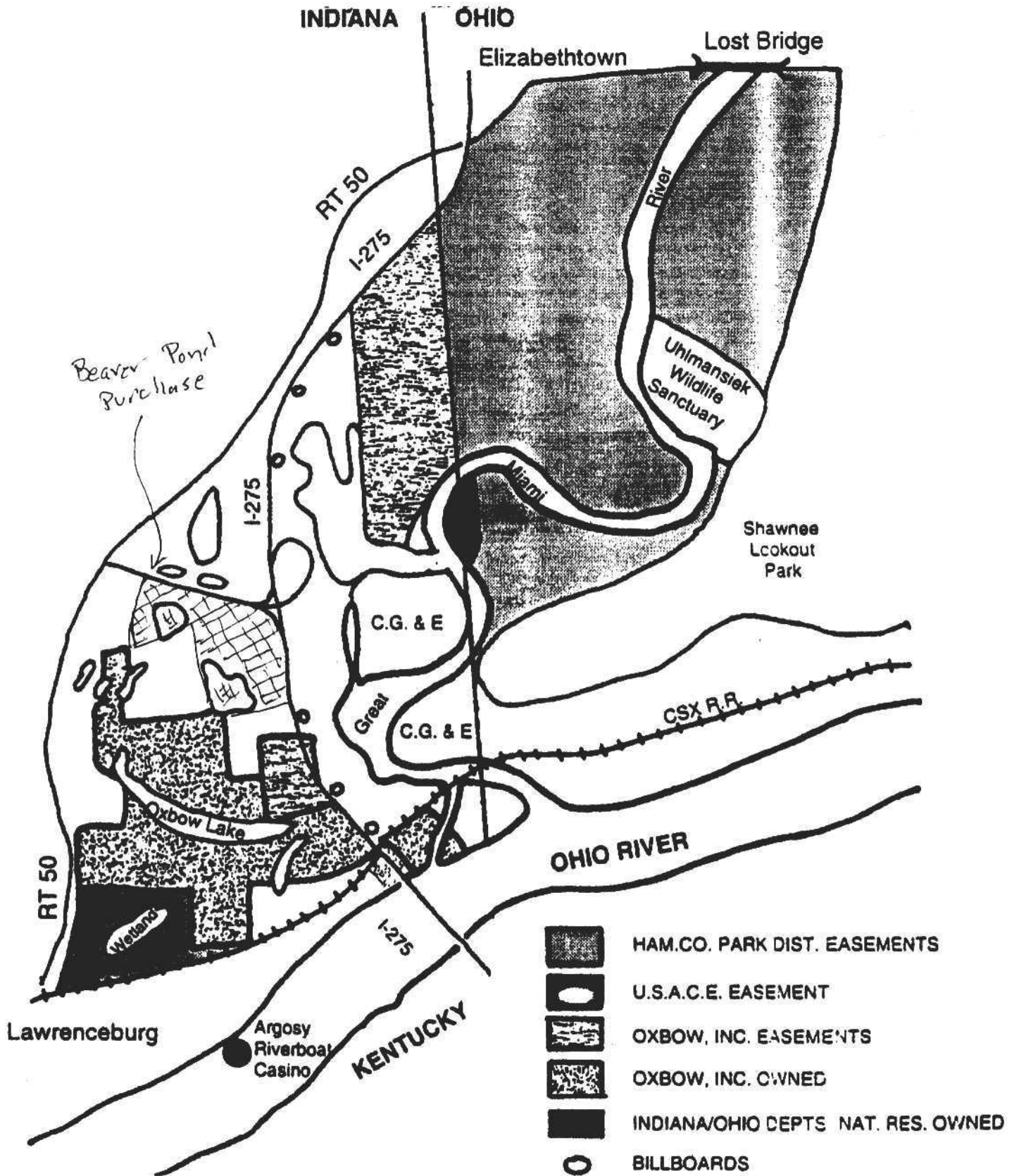
Oxbow buys more land (and some water)

Oxbow, Inc. recently purchased the "Beaver Pond" and land that surrounds it -- a total of about 75 acres. The map shows the approximate location and extent of the parcel.

Much of the land is farm land, with either soy beans or corn grown on it each summer. Oxbow will maintain this land in production by renting the crop land to a local farmer through a bidding process. Some

of the land between the pond and the highway has grown up in willow and cottonwood, while the rest is still weedy fields that attract many migrant sparrows each fall.

Dr. Joo, an aquatic ecologist who did research in and around the Oxbow, considered the area around the Beaver Pond excellent habitat and urged Oxbow's board to give it high priority for acquisition. It is extremely gratifying that the board could follow up on his suggestion so soon.



Birdathon 2001: A Birdathon Alternative

Charlie Saunders

A gentle thunderstorm. We sat in the car (that cold, cold, wet day). And we sat there...No one doubted it was a Birdathon. The Ohio Agriculture Department, noting we were seven inches behind in our rain for the year, had called to confirm we were doing the Birdathon again this year. We may contract our services to rain-parched Florida. Hire us to do a Birdathon, and the much-needed rain would come.

It wasn't just the rain that told us it was a Birdathon. The car had the smell of a Birdathon. The 24-hour-old bran muffins were being passed around And the bagels. The cream cheese was sitting in the cooler, untouched, as it has for all the other Birdathons. "Is that the sound of a distant train I hear?" And, yes, the Birdathon jokes.

Despite the weather and food, this year was different. My wife Mary and daughter Nancy were joining us for the first time. Steve Pelikan, Dave Styer, my daughter Lauren, and I had already done many a Birdathon together.

I wanted to get to Lake Erie one more spring before Lauren went to college.

The Birdathon weekend was the only time. Couple that with our confusion as to the Birdathon rules this year: we initially thought there were no geographic boundaries.

"Let's go to Lake Erie. We probably won't see as many species, but it'll be different."

"Why not go to Lake Erie and stay there? Call it a Birdathon from 5:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. and then stay for the weekend."

"But why necessarily start at five? If we are breaking the rules on where to go, why not start whenever we want? We can't leave home until 3:30. Let's go to Spring Valley, find a good bird, and start then. We'll just run the Birdathon for the following 24 hours."

And so it was. We were eating in the car, waiting for the thunderstorm to pass over. No birds but six Canada Geese next to the parking lot, and they seemed more of Alfred Hitchcock than of Roger Tory Peterson.

Alas, the storm did break. We got out of the car, in a light rain, and found a few of our target southern birds: Carolina Chickadee, Orchard Oriole, Yellow-throated Warbler. We hopped in our car and followed our ill-conceived plan of driving north to Big Island and Killdeer Plains, places with which we are only vaguely familiar. The rush-hour traffic in Urbana, where we caught every red light, was the first sign of trouble. Arriving at Big Island at 8:15 was the next sign of trouble. Arriving at Killdeer Plains in a thunderstorm at 8:40 seemed to top off our plan.

But then a wrong turn on our northbound travels put us back onto I-75 and into a 75 minute traffic jam. As veterans of some wet and unproductive Friday night Birdathons, this trip to the lake was our worst ever.

We were on the road at 6:00 A.M., in a pleasantly light rain, on our way to Magee Marsh at Crane Creek state park. Northbound migrants stop when they encounter Lake Erie. The songbirds re-fuel in any patch of woods on the lake shore. Magee Marsh is the best known of those woodlots, with a boardwalk used by birders. I know of no better place to get close-up looks at large numbers of songbirds. Our family has been to Magee Marsh several times before. Once, when Lauren was too young to be off alone, she disappeared along the boardwalk. When she later returned, she was proud of her first Cerulean Warbler, and I was proud of a birding community that helped a pre-teen see the bird.

The boardwalk is good through May, except during cold fronts and north winds, which is exactly what our thunderstorms presaged. There were warblers to be sure, more than I had seen all spring. But it was not the boardwalk it could be. Nevertheless, we kept trying.

Our friend Mike Busam and his father met us at the boardwalk. I know Mike from Cincinnati and Gilmore Ponds, and Mike grew up along Lake Erie. He and his dad had a day free for birding, and they would show us some places for birds. Although Birdathon rules require team members to be within contact the whole time, we had already decided this rule was too unwieldy for our large crowd.

Another Birdathon rule prohibits the use of recording devices. Otherwise birders might use tape recorded bird songs to induce a bird, of that species, to sing. However, this can be disruptive to the birds if lots of people are playing songs. I confess we broke the recording device rule, but in a quiet way that didn't bother the birds. Steve recorded some bird songs using a parabolic sound collector. Once home, Steve would feed these songs into his computer, where he can tell individual chickadees apart. Steve had carried this parabolic sound collector in his lap all during the car ride, and he was recording bird songs, at close range on the boardwalk. This was fine until the crowds of people get too big.

A surprise for me is the newfound popularity of birding among the Amish. We saw vans full of Amish people, carrying the highest technology opticals and field guides. Birders have never been a diverse lot, and I hope this is changing.

We next went to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, busy celebrating International Bird Migration Day. This allowed us to drive through some parts which are normally closed. We were impressed to see a Bald Eagle flying with a seemingly tiny Red-tailed Hawk. It was mid-day, and we were getting hungry. Even hungry enough to pull more bagels out of their paper bag. I was a little concerned about my teeth getting through the bagel, but hungry enough to try. Success.

Mike next led us to Pipe Creek Wildlife Area, near Cedar Point Amusement Park. In the continuing spirit of our casual Birdathon, we even stopped at a McDonald's along the way, but two school buses had beaten us.

Pipe Creek was sensational, with ten species of waterfowl, three species of terns, and many shorebirds. The latter included a male Wilson's Phalarope. Phalaropes are unusual among birds in that the female is brighter than the male and, as you might expect, it is the male who incubates the eggs.

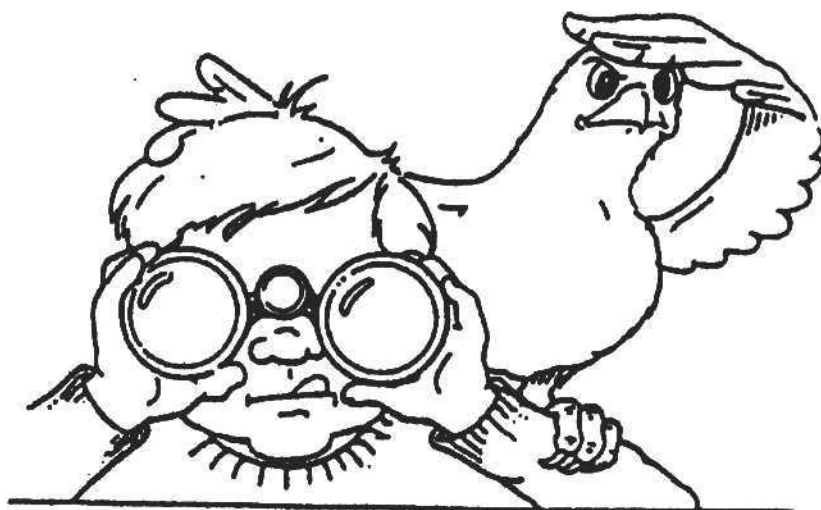
Our final stop was Sheldon Marsh where we took a leisurely walk through the woods, picking up a Black-capped Chickadee and Philadelphia Vireo. As

we realized our 24 hour Birdathon time had expired, we also realized there was but one Birdathon rule we hadn't broken. Hence, we decided to keep counting birds, until we finished at Sheldon Marsh. Our last bird was an Osprey flying, just after we had piled in the car, 25 hours after we began.

Everybody got back out and recorded the bird. Off to dinner.

Our tour guide, Mike, knew more than birds, so he directed us to a good Italian restaurant in Sandusky. Before we tallied our birds, everyone guessed our total. The prize for the winner was the remaining bagel. Some guessed as low as 115. I still believe they were trying to avoid the bagel. I was the proud winner, guessing within one bird of our 134 bird total.

After the best Birdathons, I can still hear the birds singing as I lie down for the night. This year was not that way, as we did not run into the number of birds that we normally do. However, this year's Birdathon report ends a few nights later, again as I retired for the night. Surprised at what I felt under the covers, I turned the light back on and there was, yes, a rock-hard pumpernickel bagel, my prize.



Oxbow, Inc.

A nonprofit organization formed by conservation groups and concerned citizens of Ohio and Indiana for the purpose of preserving and protecting a wetlands ecosystem known locally as the Oxbow, Hardintown, or Horseshoe Bottoms, from industrial development and to preserve the floodplain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers for use as a staging area for the seasonal migrations of waterfowl. This agricultural area is rich in geological, archaeological, and anthropological history.

Help us save this unique wetland ecosystem. Make your state a richer place in which to live by helping us preserve this precious resource. Membership in Oxbow, Inc. is encouraged and solicited.

Individual	\$10	Family	\$15
Contributing	\$25	Supporting	\$50
Patron	\$100	Cornerstone	\$250
Sponsor	\$500	Benefactor	\$1000
Organization/Club	\$25		

Mail to: **Oxbow, Inc.**
P.O. Box 43391
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45243-0391
513-471-8001

Corporation Officers

President, Norma L. Flannery	(513) 471-8001
Vice President, Morris Mercer	(513) 941-2534
Recording Secretary, Patti Niehoff	(513) 321-0510
Corresponding Secretary, Suzanne Skidmore	(513) 561-5718
Treasurer, Mark Westrich	(812) 637-2175
Ohio Agent, Dave Styer	(513) 772-1287
Indiana Agent, John Getzendanner	(812) 537-5728

Committee Chairpersons

Conservation, Jon Seymour	(513) 634-2748
Easement Inspection, Richard Pope	(812) 637-1365
Land Management, Dave Styer	(513) 772-1287
Preservation, Norma L. Flannery	(513) 471-8001
Programs, Morris Mercer	(513) 941-2534
Research, Meg Riestenberg	(513) 921-3986
Speakers Bureau, Morris Mercer	(513) 941-2534
Jon Seymour	(513) 634-2748
Newsletter, Steve Pelikan	(513) 681-2574

Wetland Matters, the newsletter for members of Oxbow, Inc., is published bimonthly.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Cincinnati, Ohio
Permit No. 7271

513-471-8001

Need a Speaker?
Give Us a Call!

P.O. BOX 43391
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45243

OXBOW, Inc.
PROTECTING WETLANDS
Founded 1985