



WETLAND *matters*

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

Oxbow, Inc. Activities Schedule

Programs

Tuesday, July 9, 2002, 7:30 p.m.
Clifford Room, Mt. St. Joseph College

Erik and Maryetta Young will share a trip to the far north: "Alaska, Nature at Its Very Best". The scenery comes alive with two projectors in use.

Tuesday, August 13, 2002, 7:30 p.m.
Public Library, Lawrenceburg, Indiana

Yvonne Mohlman will have our program: "Wings of Beauty". This is a great opportunity to learn all about the butterflies we see around us.

Field Trips

Thursday, July 18, 2002, 6:30 p.m.

Meet Steve Pelikan at Gardens Alive for a summer evening walk around the Oxbow. Steve's on a first-name basis with birds and has invited them all to come. 513-681-2574

Saturday, August 24, 2002, 9:00 a.m.

Meet Ned Keller at Gardens Alive for a field trip into the Oxbow area. The fall migration should be underway! 513-941-6497

Oxbow, Inc. Purchases Another 70 Acres

May 8, 2002, President Norma Flannery, Treasurer Mark Westrich and Attorney Tim Mara signed with the City of Greendale for the purchase of 70 acres of land in the Oxbow area. This brings the total of owned Oxbow, Inc. land to 595 acres. Another 258 acres are Oxbow, Inc.'s in conservation easements for a total at present of 853 acres under the Oxbow, Inc. banner.

The City of Greendale originally purchased the 70 acres from Vera Evans to use as landfill for Greendale's levee. When the landfill was completed, Greendale could not finalize the purchase by Oxbow, Inc. until the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources signed off on the project. Archaeological remains had been found in the area.

Today after nearly four years of negotiations, the land belongs to Oxbow, Inc. Much of the credit goes to Norma Flannery for her negotiation skills, patience and persistence.

The Greendale area was rectangular in shape but because of the archaeological finds, parts of the area had to be skirted around with the result of three islands situated in a "swimming pool" rectangle. Canadas particularly have taken to nesting on these islands. Soon an osprey nest will be installed. "Anyone who walks or bikes on the levee will have an excellent view of the Oxbow wetlands," Norma promises.

The Hamilton County Park District controls 911 acres in conservation easements; Indiana and Ohio Departments of Natural Resources own 25 acres; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has 103 acres in easements and the Indiana Department of Transportation owns 256 acres. With the 853 acres under Oxbow, Inc., this brings a total of 2,148 acres of the Oxbow currently protected for wildlife.



by



Mercer

This is an evening in late May but seems a little more like an evening in March. The temperature was 30 degrees this morning. A little cool for May. I saw the blackberry briars white with blossoms and there was that chill in the air that I remember as a kid we called this "blackberry winter". Seeing the blackberry blossoms almost made my mouth water. I could just picture a bowl with a large cut of blackberry cobbler swimming in heavy cream --almost see the purple swirls in the cream. I like those blackberries.

May has been a very wet month. One morning we drove to the Oxbow but we couldn't see the wetland as it was under water. But the beauty of spring was everywhere. The grackles were busy and noisy. There was a flash of gold. A prothonotary warbler worked in the trees just above the water. The warbler was like a jewel in among the bright new green foliage. He stopped at times to sing his song. The clear, loud call was so nice to hear.

I saw a crow flying with a red-winged blackbird in hot pursuit. I've often wondered why much larger birds allow smaller birds to chase them out of an area. I wondered too about the housing of the beaver and the muskrat. The beaver lodges and muskrat houses were under water but that is what will happen if you build in the flood plain.

I don't know when I've enjoyed watching spring come as much as I have this year. The redbud and the dogwood were so pretty. The floor of the woods soon greened up. The May-apples seemed to just jump up as did so many of the other wildflowers. I've enjoyed seeing the flowers on the pawpaw. The flowers came out along what seemed to be a bare limb. The pawpaw is a small purple flower. The long leaves show up as the blooms are falling off. In September the fruit will be ripe. The fruit is a brownish green with yellow insides and large dark seeds. The pawpaw fruit is very edible and good if you like them. I do like the pawpaw.

It's fun to see all the wildlife. The deer seem to be enjoying all the new foliage. A check at Los Bridge confirmed the cliff swallows are nesting under the bridge again. Frances and I were driving down along the Great Miami and we saw several large birds beside the road. I slowed down and the birds didn't take off until we were very near to them. There were 15 or 20 black vultures feeding on the carcass of a deer. As some of the vultures took off, Frances noticed their white wing tips. She had seen the turkey vulture up close but this was her first real good look at a black vulture. We have seen so many here the last few years. Lots of turkey vultures but few black until the last few years.

The Oxbow area is a large part of the valley of the three rivers. The Whitewater River winds its way through eastern Indiana and empties into the Great Miami River just below U.S. 50 and between Cleves and E-town. A few miles down river the Great Miami joins the Ohio River for the journey to the sea. This is what we call "Oxbow Country" or the "Valley of the Three Rivers."

Spring brings new life and so much beauty. The migrating waterfowl pass through, our nesting summer birds come back and get busy building nests. Many of the birds that nest in the north pass through-- the birds most of us only see in the spring or fall. But it's in spring many of them are in their great colors. I saw a doe deer and her new fawn the other evening and I would guess the fawn was only hours old as it still had trouble standing. The fawn had a beautiful spotted coat.

One of my most memorable trips was on a warm spring evening along the Great Miami. A rain shower was just over, the rain drops still dripped from the leaves. The clouds had cleared as the sun set. A gentle evening breeze carried the sweet fragrance from the honeysuckle and the blossoms of the black locust. There was the evening serenade of the wood thrush. I thought what a wonderful world God has given us if we will only take care of it. From Cliff Road, I could see the moon over the Ohio. It would be full in a little more than a week. I hoped it would be another heavenly evening such as this.

Summer is almost here as I write and it too has much beauty. Let's get out and enjoy the beauty of the Valley of the Three Rivers.



by Dave Styer

The Prothonotary Warbler: Several Mysteries

There are certain people, we've all met them, who seem to be associated with curious events. The prothonotary warbler is my bird-world candidate for such distinction.

On the national political scene we all know that the bald eagle is our national bird and that Benjamin Franklin wanted the wild turkey to be the national bird. You may recall how Richard Nixon used the prothonotary warbler to help convict alleged spy Alger Hiss:

"Although Hiss repeatedly denied ever knowing Whittaker Chambers, the ex-communist who accused him of espionage, Chambers admitted knowledge about many personal issues, including that Hiss was an amateur ornithologist who had been excited at seeing a prothonotary warbler along the Potomac

River. When asked later, Hiss independently admitted that he had seen the warbler along the river. As a member of the House Un-American Activities Committee investigating the Hiss Allegations, freshman congressman Richard Nixon played a prominent role in proving that the two men knew each other and that Hiss had perjured himself." (Lisa J. Petit, in *The Birds of North America*.)

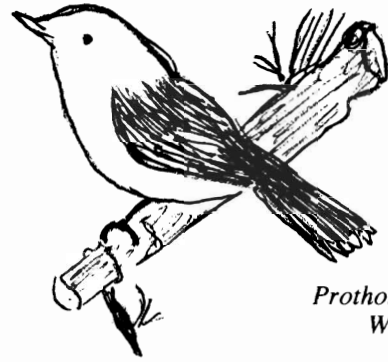
Nowadays, the prothonotary warbler is a fairly common breeding bird in the Greater Cincinnati area and in particular, the Oxbow area, nesting along the Great Miami River and by the Oxbow Lake itself. This has not always been so. Amos W. Butler wrote, in *The Birds of Indiana* (1897) that "the Ohio Valley, above the mouth of the Wabash River is unattractive to those swamp-loving birds, and they turn aside at the latter stream, ascending it to its source and crossing over into Ohio, where they have been found breeding at St. Mary's Reservoir."

To the best of my knowledge, famed wildlife photographer and one of the founding fathers of Oxbow, Inc., Karl Maslowski, saw the first prothonotary warbler in the Greater Cincinnati area. On 24 May, 1931, Ralph Dury took Karl to the mouth of the Great Miami River to meet Milton Trautman, who was inventorying fish there that spring. (Milton Trautman is the author of *The Fishes of Ohio*.) That day Karl found, and collected, a prothonotary warbler. The specimen resides in the bird collection at the Cincinnati Museum Center.

According to Kemries and Randle, in *The Birds of Southwestern Ohio*, the first breeding record is a nest found by Ron Austing in North College Hill in 1947. For me, this has always begged the issue. What was the prothonotary warbler doing in the Oxbow area in late May in 1931? In fact, there had been more than one there at that time. For some time, I have wondered if they were breeding there. This question may be viewed as indelicate since collecting half a pair could definitely impede breeding.

The birding world has changed immensely in the last 70 years. Many methods, and questions we ask first, have changed. To get as good an answer as we'll ever get, I called Karl and asked. Did he think that those prothonotary warblers were breeding in the Oxbow area in 1931? He responded that if he had known then (he was 16 years old) what he knows now, he would have been sure they were nesting. That's what they are doing here in late May! Furthermore, Karl feels that they could have been nesting there for several years but that no one was looking for them.

For those of us used to seeing new-world warblers, the prothonotary warbler is obviously a member of the warbler family. However, it has not been clear what warbler(s) this bird is most closely related to. Also, how did it get to be the only warbler in eastern North America that nests in a hole? We don't know but even Sherlock Holmes could have told us its relatives are not primarily hole nesters. In proper Sherlock Holmes fashion, we will attribute the following account to John H. Watson, M.D. However, the description of the eggs is quoted directly from A.C. Bent's *Life Histories of North American Wood Warblers*:



Prothonotary
Warbler

The other day, having picked up a beautiful set of prothonotary warbler eggs for my collection, I found myself on Baker Street near the home of my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I could not resist dropping in to show off my new treasure, and Holmes welcomed me enthusiastically.

"In my early teenage years, I was an avid oologist (egg collector) myself but I only collected what I could find in the English countryside," he said.

"These eggs come from prothonotary warblers, a golden bird that nests in holes of trees in swamps of the southeastern United States," I added.

"My dear Watson, are you sure these are authentic?"

"I'm sure they fit the proper description; what do you see strange about these eggs?"

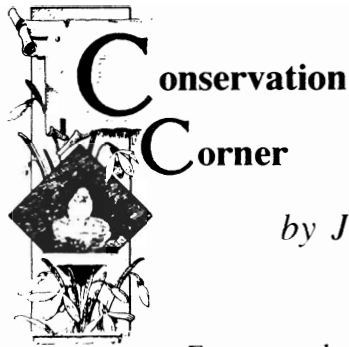
"Ah, nature contains mysteries beyond the human imagination. Look at these beautiful eggs: rich creamy, or rose-tinted cream, ground color, boldly and liberally spotted and blotched with burnt amber, bay, chestnut brown and auburn, intermingled with spots and undertones of light Payne's gray, Rood's lavender, violet-gray and purplish-gray. It is clear from this that the relatives of the prothonotary warbler are not hole-nesting birds."

This proved one of my more embarrassing moments, when Holmes would claim that I see but I don't notice. Holmes explained, "In my egg collection, it became apparent that typically hole-nesting birds, such as woodpeckers, have white eggs. Color in eggs is for camouflage, and where it is dark, there is no need for color."

SOME MUSICAL CHICKS....

Oxbow, Inc. Board Member Rick Pope is acquainted with some chickens who play the piano. Right. They pounce 'n peck (that's chicken rock 'n roll) when grains of corn drop down a funnel onto the keys of a child's toy piano. Your coin buys their corn. Moreover. Sometimes they anticipate, Rick tells us, play before the corn award arrives-- when they see you coming they know what's coming their way. However. These chickens are temperamental *arteests* and sometimes refuse to play in late afternoon. Reason? They are now stuffed -- with grains of corn. Furthermore. They would rather starve than play a Fox Trot. So much for Cole Porter Chicks. Heaven knows anything goes.

(P.S. These piano-playing fools (ooops!) fowl perform at the Green Acres Golf Range on the Whitewater River. It's Rick's brother's-in-law and sister's place.)



by Jon Seymour

Ever wondered why I call this the "Conservation Corner" and not "Preservation Place"? The word preservation is often linked with the inertia to keep everything as it is and not doing anything to actively manage the environment. Conservation, according to Webster's, is the "act of caring for and protecting natural resources." This turns out to be an active process that requires work.

The main method we have chosen to effect this conservation is farming. There is nothing new about farming the Oxbow. The area that we know and love as the Oxbow has been farmed intensively for over 200 years. However, we are working with our contract farmers to look at the best way to utilize the farming we do to help wildlife in the Oxbow.

In the past our farmers have often left strips of unharvested crop for wildlife to feed on. Recently we have been exploring the possibility of more diverse food crops to be planted and left for wildlife consumption. What crops and where to plant them are current points of discussion.

Farming also offers the easiest way of preserving the flood plain and preventing the incursion of unwanted trees, brush and noxious weeds. Smart farming with attention to the benefit to wildlife and the conservation of land use pays big benefits for the Oxbow. The leasing of the farm lands also brings in income that can be used to fund other projects. Everyone WINS. I love it!

Oxbow, Inc. Memorials

Donor

Oak Crest Animal Hospital,
Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.
Jane & Roy Bernzott
Carolyn & Gus Schmidt
Dr. & Mrs. T. H. Tsai
& Dennis
Oak Crest Animal Hospital,
Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.
Oak Crest Animal Hospital,
Cheryl L. Devine, D.V.M.

In Memory of

Tony Hesketh
Durward "Brownie" Morgan
Bob Myers
Bob Myers
Max Rohlfert
Joey Ruehlmann

**Oxbow, Inc. Thanks
The Ridgewood Garden Club
for Its Generous Contribution
as the Club Disbanded**

Oxbow, Inc.'s Hidden Treasures

Oxbow, Inc. is proud of our volunteers, particularly three women who have accumulated some 40 years of service to Oxbow, Inc. We think of them as our hidden treasures.

Peggy Gatch, Milford mother of five and grandmother of eleven, has been in charge of Oxbow, Inc. Memorials since 1995, writing letters informing friends and relatives of memorials which were given in honor of a loved one and also thanking the donors.

Peggy is a lifelong birder and devoted conservationist. She is treasurer of the Cincinnati Bird Club-- has been for nearly fifteen years. She serves on the Little Miami Scenic River Conservation Committee where each volunteer undertakes the care of a section of the river. She works with the Valley View Foundation hoping to make the East Fork River, as she says, "a mini Oxbow" for migrating birds and water fowl.

Any leftover time in her life will find Peg at a duplicate bridge table.

Joanne Olman of Glendale has managed the membership list and mailing labels since Oxbow, Inc. began. A retired Princeton School District school psychologist, she wastes not one minute of her precious time. Besides playing the piano and cello and attending numerous musical concerts, Joanne knits, jogs, bikes and currently is studying French and wool spinning. Add to all this, membership in a book club for the last ten years and you marvel at how she had the zip and hours to prepare those many thousands of Oxbow, Inc. labels for their journeys.

Velda Miller has been addressing the membership postcards for monthly meetings since Year Two of Oxbow, Inc. She began doing the Indiana cards but soon learned chores done well mean more chores to take on, like the Ohio membership cards. Velda is proud of the fact that her husband, John Miller, was the second president of Oxbow, Inc. They have two teenagers-- Elizabeth and Pete.

For 26 years, Velda has worked for the U.S. Postal Service, 17 at the Aurora Post Office. With her biology degree from U.C., she is interested in and actively participates in all kinds of conservation clubs including the Indiana Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, the Lane Siekman Environmental Park under development in Rising Sun, Indiana's Project WILD.

With the late Art Wiseman, Velda prepared avian study skins for the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History and later prepared specimens for the Hamilton County Park District as well as the Metro Parks of Butler County. Throughout the year, she goes into some Indiana elementary classrooms presenting hands on programs pertaining to nature. "And when we can't bring nature to the classroom," Velda says, "we take the class to nature." With her help, children have learned first hand about the problems of invasive plants by participating in garlic mustard pulls and the cutting of Japanese Honeysuckle vines out of trees. With Dave Styer and Steve Pelikan, Velda escorted Bright Elementary School Outdoor Club members and their parents on hikes into the Oxbow.

Oxbow, Inc. Treasury Report for Year 2001

by Mark Westrich, Treasurer

Oxbow bought over 75 acres of land in 2001 including the Beaver Pond! Still more land has been purchased this year, and we continue to save for the next opportunity to buy wetland in the Great Miami/Ohio river flood plain. There is yet much land to be acquired from willing sellers, but prices are high due to continuing commercial interest in the area.

Oxbow saved about \$89 thousand in 2001. This is \$33 thousand less than last year largely due to declining return on savings. Member gifts grew substantially by over \$9 thousand or 24%.

Major expense items in 2001 were for legal, security, and publicity. Expenditures were required to evaluate proposals for commercial development in the flood plain, and to represent the interests of the wetland before various public and private agencies. This expense was mostly legal, about \$11 thousand. Security patrols are a new but necessary expense amounting to about \$6 thousand. And promotional and commemorative items that had been purchased in years past [to be sold for fundraising, mostly T-shirts] were expensed to be given away to school groups and others interested in the flood plain area, \$4 thousand.

Administrative and fundraising expenses were about \$1,500, or 1.25% of revenue.

Oxbow is a 100% volunteer organization – there are no salaries, expense accounts, or offices – and is beholden to the generous support of the membership and public. The IRS Forms 990 for Oxbow, Inc. and Oxbow of Indiana, Inc. may be seen on www.guidestar.org.

Net Income	
2001	
Revenue	
Dues	\$23,063.00
Donations	\$14,769.23
Memorials	\$4,733.00
Land Acquisition	\$2,527.00
Interest	\$47,939.12
Dividend	\$0.00
Bird-A-Thon	\$4,178.60
Crop Income	\$22,781.50
Book Sales	\$16.45
Misc	\$50.00
Revenue	\$120,057.90
Expenses	
Postage&Phone	\$1,295.10
Office Supplies	\$111.30
Newsletter	\$2,390.23
Taxes & Ins	\$6,226.81
Legal	\$10,602.76
Fund Raising	\$0.00
Book Cost	\$96.63
Video Cost	\$910.00
Shirt Cost	\$3,177.91
Cap Cost	\$122.21
Security & Misc	<u>\$5,760.31</u>
Expenses	\$30,693.26

Balance Sheet	
2001	
Cash & Investment	\$1,383,909.26
Land	\$691,118.53
Easements Owned	\$231,963.28
Equipment	\$0.00
Book Stock	\$0.00
Video Stock	\$0.00
Shirt Stock	(\$0.00)
Cap Stock	<u>\$0.00</u>
Assets	\$2,306,991.07
Debt	\$0.00
Equity	<u>\$2,306,991.07</u>
Total	\$2,306,991.07

Top Birdathon Count Is 155 Species

Fire and Brimstone Wins Again!

They did it again! For the sixth year in a row, Fire and Brimstone, Oxbow, Inc. Team #2, saw or heard the most species in the 24-hour period of the Birdathon contest May 10 and 11: 155 species. All told, the day was a big success with no rain, an improvement over the past several years. All those of you who pledged specific amounts for your favorite team will receive, if you have not already, a letter from your team captain announcing your team's prowess.

Fire and Brimstone is composed of four excellent birders: Jay Stenger, Jay's thirteen-year-old son Jack, Joe Bens and Paul Wharton. Jack Stenger, on the team for the last three winning years, considers himself undefeated. Jay says Jack knows all the birds' songs "and hears better than I do." Paul and Joe won three Birdathons in the early years of the event.

"We have a great team and go through two cases of Pepsi. Need that sugar rush! The Birdathon makes us really appreciate the spring migration. We love doing it!" Jay exclaims. "Eventually, it's a definite possibility that 170 species will be tops."

Asked if he could offer any winning tips, Jay stated "We would get a run for our money if some other birders I know would enter the contest. We do plan methodically, take a few days vacation to check out what roads are best, what the water conditions are, out on the farms which rain pools have the most shore birds. On Birdathon day we don't waste time. We know where to go. We travel about 500 miles. We go to Summit Lake in Indiana, Boone County Cliffs in Kentucky, the Oxbow and Spring Grove Cemetery plus other birding areas. After covering



Winning Fire and Brimstone Team #2, l to r: Paul Wharton, Jack Stenger, Jay Stenger, Joe Bens.

Winton Woods during the night this year where we found the barred and screech owls, we drove down the road to my house to catch two hours sleep. It was terrible getting up but it paid off later. We were at Miami Whitewater waiting before the first gray light of dawn. Amazing, one species we always find was missing this year: the hairy woodpecker."

Team #5, Finneytown's Fabulous Flying Fortune Seekers (Jerry Lippert, Wayne Wauligman and Erich Baumgardner) recorded 129 species and took second place in the contest. For a complete picture of their exciting adventure, see their story on the following pages.

Team #3, the Miami Whitewater Peregrinators, made up of Mike Busam and Charlie Saunders, totaled 122 species -- all seen at Miami Whitewater Park. Mike says, "Every bird we saw we earned. We worked hard, chased a Lincoln sparrow for a half hour." They had a great time and considered themselves lucky to find a Virginia rail and a black-throated blue warbler. The evening before while checking out the best areas to concentrate on, Mike was thrilled to see a common checkered skipper, a butterfly "really too early to be here."

Oxbow, Inc. Team #1 -- the Geriatric Gents -- turned in a total of 102 species. George Laycock and Karl Maslowski had three extra spotters this year: Jerry Meyer, Bob Schrimper and Randy Lakes. George reports, "It was a good outing, everything went well but we missed some species we expected to see. And this is a good score for us."

Team #4, No See Ums, took themselves out of the running since they extended the rules somewhat by birding on the east and west coasts instead of the tri-state: Steve Pelikan on Martha's Vineyard, Ma., and David Styer in Monterey, Ca., with help from Lauren Saunders in Ithaca, N. Y.

Dave enjoyed sunny weather finding a total of 135 species including these interesting sightings: California quail, Heerman's gull, band-tailed pigeon, common poorwill, Anna's and Allen's hummingbirds, sage sparrow and great-tailed grackle. Steve had a harder time with weather that varied between drenching nor'easter rain and wind and more pleasant, peaceful showers. He found 55 species that weren't on Dave's list making a total of 190 species for the team. "This was a shameless attempt to run up a large list of birds," Steve joked. Highlights of Steve's birding included greater shearwater, black-capped chickadee, eastern warblers (blackburnian, pine, prairie) and two endangered species: piping plover and least tern.

Many other Oxbow, Inc. affiliated birders took part in Birdathon 2002. One group, comprising Jon Seymour, Don Morres and Dave Brinkman, is Cincinnati Nature Center Team #2. However, Jon designates his personal pledges from about 35 friends at P&G to go to Oxbow, Inc. Jon and his team scored 129 species, with a certain pride showing for finding the yellow-crowned night heron at Gilmore Pond.

Wetland Matters hopes to report the totaled pledges in the next issue. The Birdathon is Oxbow, Inc.'s annual fund raiser.

A Fabulously Flying Good Birdathon

by Jerry Lippert

from Notes by Wayne Wauligman

Sky pools, sky pools. And more sky pools! Countless pools of water reflecting sky in the middle of farm fields. Our heads turned quickly to search the pools' edges for shorebirds as we whizzed by the tantalizing habitats at 60 or 70 m.p.h. Ok, it's true, sometimes we may have been going near 80.

Most years on Birdathon, there are so few of these shorebird habitats that you have to hope a few spots even have water. If they do, they usually have birds, and sky pools rule! The presence or absence of shorebirds can make or break a Birdathon score. But this year, an hour before Birdathon, it was starting to look like sky pools were as cheap and unfulfilling as shares of Enron stock.

There were literally too many sky pools to check in the Birdathon area. Because there were so many, the birds had many choices and could be anywhere. We weren't finding the birds yet. A week earlier, many pools we'd discovered had numerous shorebirds and more rain had made things even wetter. But would the birds stick around?

On Birdathon Friday, May 10, 2002, 4:00 p.m., on country roads between Brookville and Summit Lake State Park, our necks were nearly getting creaky and our eyes googly from focusing on so many sky pools as we passed them at high speed. But where were the shorebirds? There were none in evidence at pool after pool! Had the birds moved north? Were they hopelessly dispersed along the plethora of pluvial pools?

We hadn't had time to check any pools above Brookville that day or even the day before. So, our strategy was to go to our ace in the hole, the best pool we knew of, in case they were there -- a pool we'd discovered in recent weeks stuffed with shorebirds and ducks, and even a sora rail. If this pool was loaded again, we'd start our Birdathon there, count up the birds at 5:00 p.m. and then head to Summit Lake. If not, we planned to go to Summit Lake and risk losing some time after 5:00 p.m. on the road. We took this gamble.

We arrived at our ace, only to find that the sky pool of all sky pools was relatively devoid of birds. So were all the sky pools as we drove north between it and Summit Lake.

Plan B. We started counting birds from the car at 5:00 p.m. Grackle, robin, cowbird. Not exactly what we had envisioned our first birds to be. We were doing the best we could with the time we had beforehand, not wanting to miss out on a killer sky pool and wanting to rule it out or in (out in this case) while in the area. We had spent most of our pre-Birdathon scouting time checking out Hueston

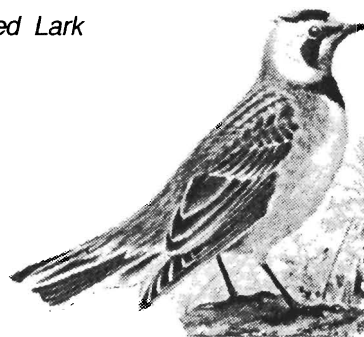
Woods in order to rule it out or in (out). It helps when Plan B has some rewards already built in. Erich and Wayne had discovered a green heron nest near Summit Lake. We approached the spot and barely had to stop to see Mother Green Heron sitting on her eggs. How nice to so easily get a bird that some years we've had trouble finding.



Green Heron

We made it to Summit Lake and soon were flush with loons. There were more loons on the lake than I'd ever seen here at one time. We did our best to see if one of them might be a red-throated loon, but none of them passed the test. We hoped no one else would report one from here because they were all common loons to our eyes. Bobolinks and horned larks were present in nearby fields.

Horned Lark



We lingered at the northeast dike because we knew there had to be more waterfowl on this lake. Some ducks far off in the sun's glare, in water we'd already looked over, seemed like just more mallards-- I was ready to write them off as such without scoping them. Wayne or Erich said they thought they were something different. Sure enough, they were lesser scaup. This was to be the only place we found them!

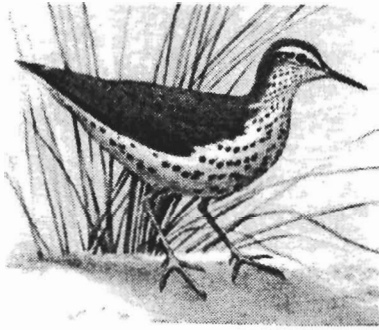
While on the dike, a couple of ladies were writing an article on birding and wanted to interview us for an Indiana nature publication of some sort. They were keenly interested in the Birdathon. We provided details about Oxbow, Inc., the Birdathon, some of the birds we'd already seen, how many we were shooting for, etc. The interview became a blur soon after and I forgot the name of the publication. Has anyone out there seen an article like this? Maybe the ladies were FBI agents.

We soon decided to leave Summit Lake. Heading south, we were trying to decide what route to take. Wayne and Erich remembered a road from earlier scouting and all of a sudden Wayne called, "Turn!". Erich turned down the

MORE...A Fabulously Flying Good Birdathon

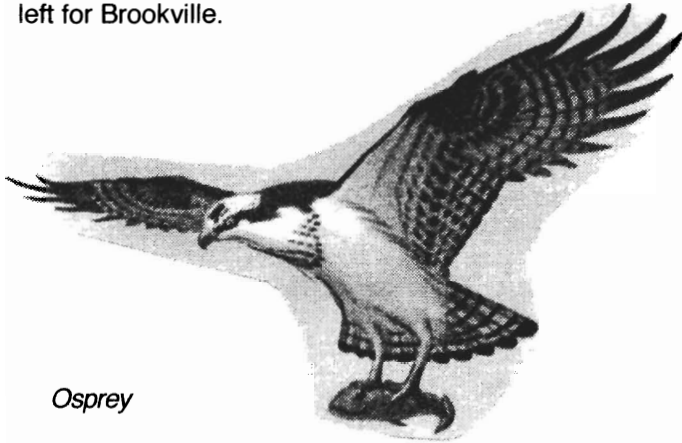
good fortune and we all reached for more snacks, I'm sure.

road. Sky pools again. No birds. Soon we arrived at a large sky pool. It was dotted with shorebirds, thick with shorebirds. Birds! Birds! Birds! Here they all were! The shorebirds we'd been looking for, congregated!



Spotted Sandpiper

We felt no creaks in our necks now and our googly eyes focused. Greater and lesser yellowlegs littered about, a large group of 30 or more short-billed dowitchers (always nice to see), semipalmated plovers, spotted sandpipers, least sandpipers, pectoral sandpipers and dunlin. We searched and searched the dirt and wet edges for an American pipit but could not find one. Surely there was one there but we were glad to have all the shorebirds we did and left for Brookville.



Osprey

At Brookville Lake's north end we heard a pileated woodpecker from across the lake and saw a nighthawk overhead. Our hopes for flying terns were dashed. It was starting to get too dark. We pulled out of there, saw cliff swallows on the bridge, then stopped on the side of Route 44 to see the osprey on the platform north of the lake.

We whipped around through the town of Liberty and on to the east side of Brookville Lake. It was dusk. We were hoping for a late-singing prairie warbler or Henlows's sparrow in fields on the east side of Brookville Lake. No such luck but all of a sudden Wayne called out again, this time, "Whippoorwill!" Sure enough, a Whippoorwill was singing. It sang, and sang, and sang, with hardly a break for several minutes or more. I hadn't remembered how they'd call nonstop for periods, so long had it been since I'd heard one. In fact, this was the first one we'd ever recorded on a Birdathon. We were quite pleased with this stroke of

Throughout the entire Birdathon, we continually reached into Erich's bottomless snack bag for high-calorie, carbohydrate items. Earlier, we had dined on some custom-made sandwiches, macaroni salad and other excellent items contributed by Wayne's wife, Paula.

This may be the first Birdathon I actually gained weight. It's also the first one in three years that I wasn't fighting a severe, allergy-caused sinus infection. This year, I got aggressive and started medicating in late February and never looked back, just plugging those antihistamines and decongestants into my system every day through the spring. It worked. I enjoyed myself quite a bit more and was feeling so well, I ate enough for three men. Erich had planned for the eventuality that we might eat, as well as birdwatch, non-stop for 24 hours. His snack bag was deep enough to supply an army of men and we nearly decimated its stocks.

We plowed into Whitewater State Park at dark. Thankfully, no one was attending the booth so we saved \$4.00. We went down to Whitewater Lake and listened for a barred owl where Wayne and I had heard one a week earlier. No such luck tonight despite our persistent calls.

However, it was a remarkable quiet spot there on the beach, as if we were in the Far North, and we were afforded wonderful views of the planets Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Mercury and Mars. All five of them there, bright as one could hope to see in our corner of the world, appearing together in this small part of the sky for a limited engagement that won't occur again like this for 38 years and hadn't occurred for over 40 years. Eventually, we gave up on the barred owl and drove down to the boat ramp at Brookville Lake where four of the five planets were still visible, Mercury having made a mercurial decision to disappear below the horizon. Only now, with the sky darkening nicely, the stars had joined the rare planetary assemblage. We city dwellers took a few moments to admire the stars we so seldom see unveiled from the cloak of city lights. Wow!

We called for three owls and were contemplating giving up on the owls -- you could feel it among us. We had other places to go. As we were readying ourselves to leave, Wayne heard a barred owl call from across the lake. It called again for good measure, and then was answered, and then called again. Nice timing, Mr. and Mrs. Barred Owl.

Erich had already driven enough miles to equal a respectable summer vacation. I got to bed about 12:30 or 1:00 a.m. The next morning we met at Winton Center at 5:45 a.m. The silt basin didn't have much in the way of waterfowl. We hightailed to Mitchell Memorial Forest. Here we saw or heard magnolia, yellow-rumped, cerulean, American redstart and yellow-throated warblers. We also heard one red-breasted nuthatch from the hemlock grove, a Birdathon first for our team. How had we missed them all

these years? We never went to Mitchell until now.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Next we were off to Bowle's Woods at Miami Whitewater Forest. Last year, Erich had spotted a Connecticut warbler here. This year, we heard or saw the balance of our songbirds, plus hairy woodpecker and eastern screech owl. Oddly, for the first time in memory we did not record Kentucky warbler or rose-breasted grosbeak at Bowle's Woods but we did record seven warbler species plus a Philadelphia vireo which Wayne picked out of a tree.

At the Shaker Trace Wetlands, we tromped about through many flooded fields and did record common snipe and sora. The sora showed itself at the last possible moment at the last wet area we walked. Just as we were leaving the area after walking the wetlands for more than two hours, Erich flushed it from underfoot as he finished walking across that last pool. It didn't call. It really wanted to be *visually counted!* This was amazing timing.

At Miami Whitewater Forest along Strimple Road, we saw our first ruby-throated hummingbird. While a blue-gray gnatcatcher was away from its nest we had just discovered, the hummer was attempting to inspect the gnatcatcher's nest. Nearby, what was apparently a field sparrow gave a call reminiscent of, but not quite like, that of an olive-sided flycatcher. We had never heard a field sparrow call quite like this! But along this stretch of Strimple Road, blue-winged warblers call like golden-winged warblers, too! The field sparrow was even perched at the top of a tree like I've seen olive-sided flycatchers do, so I was thinking we might have the flycatcher even though the call was just a bit off. "I rarely see or hear them, so maybe it is one," I was thinking. When I put the binoculars up to it, the bill was no flycatcher bill, however. It was a thick, pale, field sparrow's bill attached to a field sparrow's gray head and rusty crown. Oh well. The Strimple Road Triangle strikes again!

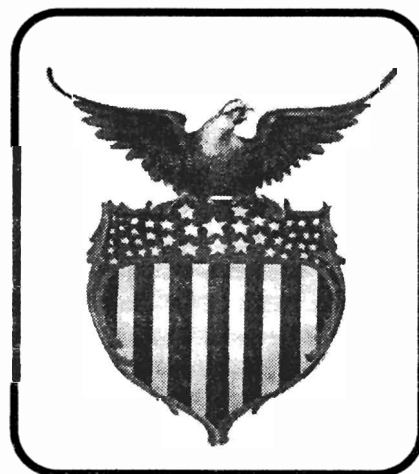
At Shawnee Lookout during the afternoon blahs, we were hoping for prairie warbler and thought we heard one from some shrubs far off. We waited patiently for a while. Nothing. Then, a yellow-breasted chat popped up from near where we were looking! For the first time in memory we missed black vulture here but we did get good looks at peregrine falcons at Miami Fort Power Plant. Erich spotted a rose-breasted grosbeak in an uncharacteristic spot, near the ground on a steep slope, and we all got looks

at it. This was the only one we saw. This year, we went to Spring Grove Cemetery and were rewarded with chestnut-sided warbler, bay-breasted warbler and Kentucky warbler.

This year's tally was one of the best ever. The Nature Center staff organized a great meal, awards/prizes and kept the building open a long while. The T-shirts were great and the Nature Center gave away bird houses. Participants took a lot of time to discuss sightings and locations of unusual birds. Jay Stenger agreed to go over each species seen to create a grand list. The tally is always one of my favorite parts of Birdathon.

Thankfully, no one reported a red-throated loon from Summit Lake so we hadn't missed it. However, from a spot on the lake we had decided not to visit, another group recorded white-winged scoter, ruddy duck, great egret and a tern species, all birds absent from our team's tally. But if we had decided to go to that part of the lake, might we have felt too much time pressure and elected to bypass the incredible sky pool on the way back from Summit? "Ahhh, Grasshoppah, these are the questions every great Birdathoner must ask." The same team also found American pipit at the loaded sky pool south of Summit Lake. "If you had stayed, Grasshoppah, at the sky pool five minutes more to find the pipit, would you have missed the whippoorwill later that eve? Ahhh, perhaps knowing the answer is not what you seek, after all!" In any case, them's the breaks, Grasshoppah.

After the tally was over, Wayne and I took some time to hike around the Nature Center property. In the parking lot we saw a female Cape May warbler and along a field edge saw a Wilson's warbler-- two species we'd not seen during Birdathon. Just that quickly our final count of 129 species could have swollen to 131. We had a great time. So far, funds pledged to Oxbow, Inc. for the Fabulous Flying Fortune Seekers team total over \$670.00. Thanks to all who supported our team and Oxbow, Inc.! We didn't spend all the money on snacks, really. Just a modest percentage. We spent even less on Enron stock.



Have a happy, thankful 4th! God bless America.

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.

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