



WETLAND *matters*

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

Activities Schedule

Programs

Tuesday, November 14, 2000, 7:30 p.m.
at the Cincinnati Zoo. Steve Maslowski will have our program. Steve has made a film for the Hamilton County Parks. He will share this overall view of the Parks with us.

Tuesday, December 12, 2000, 7:30 p.m.
at the Lawrenceburg Public Library. Dr. Chuck Cornett, an Analytic Chemist at the College of Mt. St. Joseph, will give us a report on the research he has made in the Oxbow area. And Chuck will show us some of the beauty of the Oxbow as caught by the digital camera.

Field Trips

Sunday, November 5, 2000, 9:00 a.m.
Meet Dave Styer at Gardens Alive for a trip around the Oxbow. Dave will show us some wildlife and some of the changes at the Oxbow.

Saturday, December 9, 2000, 8:00 a.m.
Hamilton County Parks annual Winter Bird Count. It will conclude at 3:30 p.m. and the tally will be held at the Winton Woods Center. Experienced birders will lead the count in the County's 16 parks. To sign up for the count, interested persons should call the Parks office at 521-7275. Extension 240.

Oxbow Area Designated As "Important Bird Area"

Greater Protection for Area Will Be the Result

A representative of the National Audubon Society was to announce October 18 as *Wetland Matters* went to press that the Oxbow area has been named an "Important Bird Area." The announcement was made at the Trailside Nature Center in Burnet Woods which has also been named an IBA. The Audubon Society has joined other organizations such as the American Bird Conservancy to sponsor the program.

The basic idea is to protect the places where birds breed, over-winter, or stop on migration. To qualify as an IBA, a site must have met at least one of the several rigorous criteria; that is, it must stand out from other areas because it has large concentrations of birds, has species of high conservation priority, or birds associated with a unique habitat.

Once "Important Bird Areas" are identified, cooperative measures are taken to ensure their continued value as "safe havens" for birds. Local conservation groups, bird watchers, public officials and the private land owners or public land managers are to come together to plan the best management strategy for the area, details of which remain to be worked out.

Already New York State has modeled its bird conservation law after the IBA Program, using it as a springboard for managing state owned land for the benefit of bird populations.

The "Important Bird Area" Program is one component of a many-faceted effort involving hundreds of non-profit groups and government agencies as well as corporations, known as "Partners in Flight."

Dave Styer represents Oxbow, Inc., on Audubon Ohio's IBA Committee.

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Field Notes

By Morris Mercer

On a late summer expedition to the Oxbow, we had gone through E-Town heading toward Lost Bridge. On our right was a large corn field along the Great Miami River. We saw a cloud of red-winged blackbirds coming out of the corn. We stopped to see what was going on. We soon saw the reason for all the panic; a fast flying peregrine falcon was about half tree top high really moving on. We soon lost sight of the falcon, but it sure had the attention of the blackbirds. It's so good to see a peregrine in the Oxbow area.

Today, as I write in early October, I made a trip to the Oxbow. The drive was nice under that blue sky. The goldenrod is in full bloom, and the ironweed seemed extra purple. It was a little after noon when I turned off U.S.50. My first stop was Beaver Pond. At a glance I could see many egrets and herons all around the water hole, and I sat down for a closer look.

There were a good number of great blue herons and as many great egrets. Some hunted the shallow water; others stood on one leg. I guess they were resting the other leg. A nice group of blue-winged teal worked the shallow water, while a few mallards rested on the bank. I noticed some action around and on a small island. There were a few ring-billed gulls; then there were those with redbills, oh, yes, the Caspian terns. I did get to watch the terns fish for their lunch. They hovered about 50 or 60 feet above the water then dove in after a small fish. They entered the water with a lot of splash. There was more movement on the small island. With closer look, I saw several small shore birds. I called them "peeps" and let it go at that. There were a couple of killdeer for scale. The double-crested cormorants were busy fishing. Most swam with just their neck and head above the water. Down in the corner, nine cormorants stood on one short little log in the water. I couldn't see anything great about that little log, but the birds seem to like it. It sure was togetherness. A green heron flew by, and it was time to move on.

My trip around to Oxbow Lake was different. The heavy equipment brought in by the city of Greendale was working hard to make a levee out of the old railroad grade. The holes they are digging are bigger than I had anticipated. The holes may be future mud flats for the Oxbow. The soy bean fields are golden, and the corn is as high as an elephant's eye. I stopped and walked out to the big bend of the Oxbow. The tree that has stood there for so long has broken off about ten feet above the

ground. Most of the old tree fell in the water. The crop of poison ivy is looking good and has begun to turn red.

It was time to look around and what a beautiful view unfolded. Due to the summer rains, the water level is high. There are no mud flats. Today the sky was so blue with only a few white puffy clouds. The breeze out of the north had the chill of autumn. The breeze caused the willows to sway gently, and caused small ripples on the water. It carried the scent of September and passed on to whisper in the brown dry leaves of standing corn.

The panoramic view before me looked like a nature film. Almost anywhere I looked there were great egrets and great blue herons. Birds were in the water; birds were on the bank. Blue-winged teal and a few mallards worked the shallow water. Double-crested cormorants were busy in the water. I saw one with a fish I was going to have for lunch. The fish was many times bigger around than the bird's neck, and I thought to myself, "This I got to see." The cormorant got the head of the fish in first. Back went the bird's head, and down went the fish. Now I've heard of having a lump in your throat, but that was ridiculous.

I noticed that where there was a stick or a log in the water turtles had climbed out to catch a few rays of the warm afternoon sun. One fair sized log had eight good sized red eared turtles on it. On the end of the same log stood a great blue heron. I started to count the number of birds at the far end of the water hole when I noticed movement in the background. Out from among the willows came a fine looking deer. Then two more deer came into view. They were all dressed in their beautiful brown deerskin coats.

The deer walked among the birds, and the birds didn't seem to even notice. Now I know if I had walked out there, every bird at that end of the water hole would have taken to wing. How do birds know the deer will not harm them? They wouldn't trust me. Maybe they have reason not to trust people.

As I sat there and felt that cool autumn breeze, I knew the best of autumn was yet to come. Once again the lines of a song ole Louis Armstrong used to sing came to mind: "And I said to myself, what a wonderful world."

In this busy world don't forget to take the time to enjoy the simple things that are all around us. The beauty of nature cannot be enjoyed on ". com."



Birds of the Oxbow

Palm Warblers

By Dave Styer

On 16 September I was driving the farm roads at the Oxbow, preparing to lead a field trip, and I saw several small flocks of palm warblers. This reminded me of the strong connection between the Oxbow and palm warblers, and of my own personal experience with them. A couple of check marks and a date in my old Peterson *A Field Guide to the Birds* remind me of my first encounter with these warblers. I was a farm boy in extreme eastern Pennsylvania when (on 19 April 53), I took my father's Zeiss field glasses and went into the old apple orchard. I was really surprised and excited to see a mixed flock of pine warblers and palm warblers, both new birds for me. The two species were similar and yet very different. The palm warblers almost continuously pumped their tails up and down. In the fields at the Oxbow, whenever I see a small bird pumping its tail, I think "palm warbler".

There are differences between here and the East Coast. Around here I never expect to see mixed migratory flocks of pine warblers and palm warblers. Besides that, there are two races of palm warblers. 'Yellow' palm warblers have bright yellow bodies underneath. These are the birds I used to see in eastern Pennsylvania. 'Western' palm warblers have off-white underbellies with bright yellow toward the rear end, and off-white or yellow throats. The western palm warblers are the only ones I have seen at the Oxbow.

Palm warblers nest north of Ohio and Pennsylvania and they generally winter south of those states. However a small flock of palm warblers wintered in the Oxbow area in 1938-39 (see my book, *Birds of The Oxbow*).

There is a strange feature to their winter range. The yellow palm warblers primarily winter on the western Gulf Coast, and the western palm warblers primarily winter in the southeast and on the Caribbean Islands. If the races of the palm warbler were named for their winter ranges, where they spend more of the year than they do on their breeding grounds, the western palm warbler would likely be called the eastern palm warbler. To emphasize this strange situation, I quote Thomas Burleigh's *Georgia's Birds*: "The Yellow Palm Warbler is a rather scarce bird in Georgia." He comments, "It seems odd that one race would spend the winter where the other would be expected, and one can only guess the reason for this crossing of migration routes between breeding and wintering ranges." On top of this, in 1965, in *The Birds of Kentucky*, Robert Mengel wrote the following about the yellow palm warbler. "There is at present no evidence of its occurrence in the state." Wow! The only space left for the main population of yellow palm warblers to migrate is through Tennessee.

Are the two races of palm warblers really two difference species? I don't think they have been studied

much. W. Herbert Wilson, Jr.'s, account of the palm warbler in *The Birds of North America* (1996) states that "The Palm warbler is one of the least studied *Dendroica* species, especially on its breeding grounds." He also states that "information on the interaction of the two subspecies is greatly needed," and that these may actually be two different species.

What have the western and yellow palm warblers got going to suggest they are just races of the same species? Both raise and lower their tails the same way, and both sing the same song. They may hybridize in western Quebec where their breeding ranges meet (see *A Field Guide to Warblers of North America*, by Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett). Why might they be separate species? They look different, and they have remarkably different migratory routes. Also, the yellow palm warbler is an earlier migrant in spring. But here's the clincher: the yellow palm warbler is the only bird in the world to channel its north/south migration to run east/west though Tennessee. Why would a bird do that? It must love country music.

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of Don and Shirley
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Daughter Cindy
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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
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