



THE PLAIN DEALER

AERIAL VIEW

Sanctuary's value easy to see for birders

Thursday, June 23, 2005

James F. McCarty
Plain Dealer Reporter

Every now and then a real-estate developer will call the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland offering absurdly large amounts of money for one of the prettiest 165 acres of prime habitat anywhere in Northeast Ohio: the Aurora Sanctuary.

And very gentlemanly, club president Dan Melcher will assure the developer that he and his fellow club members are not interested in selling the land at any price. The developer usually answers with some version of the same retort:

"We just hate to see all of that land go to waste."

To any doubters who might question the value of trails, bridges and boardwalks through undeveloped tracts of maple- beech forest, where the calls of pileated woodpeckers and wood thrush echo, with ponds alive with tree swallows and kingfishers and with a rushing creek of pure water where crayfish and darters lurk, rest assured this land is not going to waste.

About a dozen birders met in a parking lot outside the sanctuary at dawn last weekend to help document the different species of breeding birds there. The findings were impressive and will be included as part of a package when the Audubon club applies to obtain Important Bird Area designations for the Aurora property and nearby Novak Sanctuary.

Audubon's predecessor, the old Cleveland Bird Club, bought the land in 1941, making it the oldest bird sanctuary in Ohio. Remnants of Aurora's early settlers remain, such as boundary stakes, shards of pottery and piles of stones. We walked into the preserve on an old wagon road that the city once proposed paving - another potential incursion that the club successfully fought off, Melcher said.

Passing through an understory rich with spice bush, viburnums and dogwoods, we were greeted by the piercing "peet-ssah" of the Acadian flycatcher. Before the morning was over, we would hear dozens more.

Farther along the trail, the canopy was filled with a cacophony of red-eyed vireos, scarlet tanagers and Eastern pewees - all with easily recognizable songs, but difficult to see through layers of foliage. Woodpeckers and orioles abounded, while yellow warblers and common yellowthroats competed for attention with the green, bull and leopard frogs croaking in the ponds.

In a hawthorn tree on a spit of land beside the water, Marty Mangano and John Lillich found a nest. After we stepped back, the occupants returned: two Eastern kingbirds. A fat garter snake slithered below but appeared to pose no threat to the eggs. Later, hidden beneath a foot bridge over Hickory Creek, Mangano found another nest, this one crowded with four phoebe chicks.

Walking out of the woods, we heard the chipping of a pine warbler and the hooting of a barred owl. A second group of surveyors tallied a yellow-billed cuckoo, Cooper's hawk and yellow-throated vireo.

The Audubon club has succeeded in rescuing and preserving the sanctuary for 64 years. Armed with IBA

protection, the club members hope to guarantee that future generations of birders will be able to find the same variety of birds there for decades to come.

Other notable

sightings and events

Jim Tomko found and photographed a white pelican at the Mentor Lagoons. It is being seen with the Canada geese, usually in the evenings.

Sedge wrens are singing in an unmowed field on the west side of Quarry Road, south of Merriam Road, in Lorain County, Rob Harlan reports. He also found dickcissels along Exchange Road in Huron County.

At least two pairs of prothonotary warblers are nesting in the marsh below the heron rookery on Station Road in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Suzanne Wagner and Ray Hannikman report.

Also in the national park, Karin Tanquist and Patrick Coy report the following warblers around Kendall Lake and the Salt Run trail: cerulean, pine, hooded, ovenbird and black-throated green.

At the Brecksville Reservation of the Cleveland Metroparks, Dwight Chasar found a Northern Parula warbler near Chippewa Creek.

Sam and Beverly Walker report two sandhill crane eggs in a nest at Sandy Ridge Park in Lorain County. The nest is on an island in the west lake and is easily visible from the path. The Walkers also report the nest of prothonotary warblers by the forest exit remains active and healthy.

Marie Morgan and Bert Szabo of Akron found a lark sparrow at the Botzum Water Treatment Plant on Akron Peninsula Road in the national park.

McCarty is a reporter with The Plain Dealer.

To reach James McCarty:

jmccarty@plaind.com

© 2005 The Plain Dealer

© 2005 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.