



USA: 2-DAY NORTHWEST OHIO TRIP REPORT

15-16 May 2022

By Sarah Preston



Several Prothonotary Warblers were singing along the Magee Marsh boardwalk!

Overview

Kumar and Deanna from Wichita, Kansas came to northwest Ohio for the tail-end of The Biggest Week in American Birding festival. It was their first visit to northwest Ohio, and they were excited to see the spring warbler migration. The first day we birded the eastern portion of the region, hitting the Magee Marsh boardwalk in the morning and then Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and Maumee Bay State Park boardwalk in the afternoon. The second day we stayed on the west side of Toledo visiting Oak Openings, Cannonball Prairie, and Wildwood Preserve Metroparks. Over the two days we observed 91 species of birds including seeing 23 warbler species! To see the eBird trip report click [here](#).



Blackburnian Warbler, another star of the warbler show!

Detailed Report

Day 1, 15th May 2022.

After picking up Kumar and Deanna at 6:30am and a quick stop at McDonald's, we headed for the world-famous Magee Marsh boardwalk as our first birding stop of the day. It can be overwhelming for the uninitiated – so many birds flitting about and singing! The first bird we spent a lot of time with was a male **Prothonotary Warbler**, singing only a few feet from the boardwalk and just above his nest hole. The next birds we noted were a singing **Wilson's Warbler** and a **Canada Warbler**. We started to move on, but a buzzy song had us backtracking for great looks at a **Black-throated Blue Warbler**. A **Mourning Warbler** was singing low in the brush, but he wouldn't

reveal himself, so we moved on to point blank looks at **American Redstarts**, a **Northern Parula**, and a **Chestnut-sided Warbler**. Looking up we saw a pair of **Wood Ducks** high in the trees and saw the **Bald Eagle** nest with two eaglets inside. **American Yellow**, **Magnolia** and **Bay-breasted Warblers** were abundant. A flurry of activity had us looking at two female **Scarlet Tanagers**, then a male **Blackburnian Warbler**, a late **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, an **Eastern Screech Owl** peeking out of a hole, and then a brilliant male **Scarlet Tanager**! We were surprised to see several **Black-and-white Warblers**, usually earlier migrants and a wide-open view of a **Sora**. The last birds of the morning were several **Cape May Warblers**, two females and a stunning male.



Scarlet Tanager, not a warbler, but always thrilling to see.

We had lunch at the nearby Blackberry Corners, famous among birders as a requisite stop for “lifer pie.” There were several lifers seen that morning by Deanna and Kumar, so we all picked out a piece from the cooler.

After lunch we headed to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge to check the boardwalk and the woodland area behind the visitor’s center for some of the skulking warblers that might be visible in the more open habitat. We enjoyed fantastic views of a brilliantly blue male **Indigo Bunting** and also saw a pair of **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** and a **Swainson’s Thrush**, but the area was not productive as far as warblers were concerned, so we made our way back out, pausing for a small warbler flock that did include our first looks at a **Tennessee Warbler**. The plan was to continue heading west and check the Metzger Marsh woodlot next, but we never made it there.

Out in the parking area, Kumar said they had a rule in Kansas that you cannot pass an ice cream truck without buying some, so we stopped to get milkshakes. While waiting, I checked my phone for birding updates and was shocked to read that a **Kirtland’s Warbler** had been reported at the boardwalk at Maumee Bay State Park that morning! I excitedly told Kumar and Deanna about the

sighting and we all agreed that we must go there and look, even though the bird had not been relocated at that point.

Our adrenaline was pumping as we arrived at the Maumee Bay nature center. I explained that there are two places one can usually find warblers on this boardwalk, so we made a beeline for the northwest corner. We approached three birders already looking at something and asked what they were on. They casually responded, “A **Kirtland’s Warbler**.” It was unbelievable! We enjoyed unobstructed views of the female **Kirtland’s Warbler** as a crowd began to gather around us.

Satisfied with our looks, we headed to another part of the boardwalk to see a perched **Common Nighthawk** and a group of fledgling **Eastern Screech Owls** before heading back to their hotel in Toledo.



*Before the trip, Kumar said that he did not expect to see a **Kirtland’s Warbler**. Well, we like to exceed expectations and this warbler was the headliner!*

Day 2, 16th May 2022.

The amazing success of Day 1 was a hard act to follow. The plan for Day 2 was to search for the “off-boardwalk” stars of the warbler show that breed in Ohio but are not found in marshy habitat.

The first stop was a densely wooded area along the Wabash Cannonball bike trail inside of Oak Openings, a large Toledo metropark. We heard an **Acadian Flycatcher** call out “pizza!” several times and then heard the loud, resonant call of a **Pileated Woodpecker**, uncommon for northwestern Ohio. The woodpecker came closer and we got good views of what is considered to be one of the biggest, most striking forest birds on the continent. Then we heard the rising “buzz buzz, buzz buzz, zigga zigga zeeeeee” of our target for that stop, the **Cerulean Warbler** and eventually got brief views of the aptly named blue warbler high in the tree tops. While we had

been trying to see the Cerulean, a series of descending whistles followed by a jumble of notes distracted us. It was a **Louisiana Waterthrush**, notably rare for the area, but in the perfect habitat, along a stream. We watched it walk along a log and bob its tail.



*It was fun to watch the antics of the **Red-headed Woodpeckers** at Oak Openings.*

The next stop within Oak Openings was at an area of sand dunes. We spent some time here observing a male **Blue-winged Warbler** as it sang, “bee buzz buzz” from several high perches around the edge of a field. This stop was also our first sighting of a pair of **Red-headed Woodpeckers**, a species we would see several times throughout the rest of the day.

After that, we headed to the Oak Openings lodge and an area referred to as “Tornado Alley.” In the parking lot, we heard the high-pitched whistle of a **Broad-tailed Hawk** as it soared overhead and interacted with a **Red-shouldered Hawk**. Walking the trail, we encountered more **Indigo Buntings** and heard a **Yellow-throated Vireo**, a species which we saw later. From a bridge, we got amazing views of an **American Woodcock** alongside a creek. We then spotted an **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, which attracted some attention after pointing it out to fellow birders. Further down the trail, we were treated to views of a masked **Common Yellowthroat**, a species usually heard more than seen. As we neared a wooded area, a ringing “tawee-tawee-tee-o” was heard and we quickened the pace. We searched the trees, not expecting to see this warbler that favors dense cover, but then Deanna spotted it, a **Hooded Warbler** singing high in the trees right next to the trail!



We were lucky to see this American Woodcock right out in the open.



Hooded Warblers do not make regular appearances on the Magee Boardwalk, so finding this one singing at Oak Openings was a real treat!

Before we headed to lunch at a restaurant just outside the park, we stopped at Girdham Road to see the **Lark Sparrows**. This was the easiest target of the trip, viewed walking in the road before we even got out of the car!

After lunch we headed to Cannonball Prairie Metropark in search of sparrows. As we walked the trail into the middle of the prairie, we noticed a pair of **Horned Larks** hovering above the grass. **Savannah** and **Grasshopper Sparrows** could be heard singing all around and were seen briefly as they flew up out of the long grass. Our ears strained to hear the shortest North American bird song and, finally, “tsi-lick” a **Henslow’s Sparrow** was singing quite close and another was on the other side of the trail. The first bird stayed teed up for at least five minutes allowing excellent scope views. On the way back to the car, a **Western Osprey** caught a fish in the small lake by the parking lot and flew away with it.



*We watched this **Henslow’s Sparrow** for several minutes as it sang its sneeze-like song. Shortest song ever!*

On the way back to the hotel in Toledo we stopped at Wildwood Preserve Metropark to look for the fledgling **Barred Owls** that had been seen throughout the festival, but a single, “Whooo” was the only sign of the owls that afternoon.

Over the two days we explored two distinct regions, which allowed us to see the very best of The Biggest Week, the perfect plan for busy people who may not have ten days to devote to the entire festival. The mid-May timing also allowed us to maximize the warbler variety, hitting the middle of their migration and catching both early and late migrating warblers.