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A Fabulous February Freeze

By Tom Fishburn

With the frigidly cold weather of recent weeks, nature has created opportunities to enjoy waterfowl in the manner that birders hope. Up close. When Lake Erie freezes, ducks, geese, and gulls look for open water wherever they can find it. Flowing water freezes slower so the areas along the Cuyahoga River like Scranton Flats provide places for viewing. Although I did not get to Scranton Flats at an opportune time, I did get to a couple other places.

By February 12th, Lake Erie at Avon Lake was one of the few places to find open water. The pier at the Miller Road Park took me out a bit over the water to get some good close looks. Large numbers of Canvasbacks, Redheads, Scaup, and gulls were scattered around. Also, smaller numbers of Bufflehead, Goldeneye, and Ruddy Ducks were present. I heard about a single White-winged Scoter that showed up there a couple days later.

Two days later on the 14th, I went to the Mentor Lagoons Nature Preserve. At a small pond close to the road I was able to sit on the bank and watch a feeding frenzy. Redheads would dive and if one came up with a fish it was often chased by another or one of the gulls there. Last year I completely missed seeing Redheads so I'm delighted I got this opportunity to photograph many of this beautiful species.

I also visited Lorain Harbor but for a different reason. A large flock of Lapland Longspurs has continued to be seen at the mouth of the frozen Black River. Although they are numerous in their breeding treeless arctic tundra habitat, and Ohio always sees a few, they favor the midwest states west of Ohio. This year is quite an exception, if not unprecedented.

To the delight of many this year, Lapland Longspurs are being seen throughout the state in large flocks. They have been more widespread than in the past where mostly western Ohio counties would get larger numbers. This year, even southeastern Ohio has reported large flocks of these Longspurs. As they are known to enjoy feeding on cracked corn, birders have left piles of it on the ground to entice the flocks to return. And, as the news spreads, more birders have gotten to enjoy viewing them.