



WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Visiting Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve

With Lukas Padegimas, Traveler, Birder and Photographer

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Introduction

Hi, my name is Lukas Padegimas and I am a birder from the northeast Ohio area. For this Audubon talk, I’ve been asked to share a few stories about myself and a few things that I do for conservation.

I guess I ought to mention too, that, I’m standing here in one of my favorite parks in all of northeast Ohio, Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve. A site that didn’t exist until 1972 when the Cleveland Port Authority started dredging the Cuyahoga River and dumping the silt in this particular area.

Since then, nature has reclaimed it and taken over. As time went on, it turned into a spectacular park and wonderful location for migratory birds, namely in May and September.

For a while, it was closed off to the public. But shortly thereafter, and after lots of pressure from birding groups, it was turned into a park, held by the Port Authority and taken care of by the Cleveland Metroparks.

Background

Now, a little bit about me.

I got into the world of birding around June 2004. As a fifth grader, I attended a Sunday bird walk attended by Kevin Metcalf, a famous Ohio birder that no longer lives here. But the scene takes place in the North Chagrin Reservation on an overlook over Buttermilk Falls.

Up in a tall Oak tree, he points out a beautiful crimson red bird with black wings, a Scarlet Tanager. And when I saw that I thought, "Oh my God, you can see these beautiful tropical things in Cleveland, Ohio of all places?" I was fascinated! And ever since, I wanted to see more.

In Ohio alone, you can see over 300 species of birds within a year if you so desire. Some of them are common, some of them are rare. They're kind of like Pokemon - except they're real! And you get to go into some fascinating places in search of them. And get into some interesting adventures along the way as well!

I joined the Kirtland Bird Club and the Ohio Young Birders Club - two organizations that have influenced me as a conservationist and as a birder myself.

In 2007, when I met Delores Cole, then President of the Kirtland Bird Club, at North Chagrin Metropark Reservation, since I had been attending those Sunday bird walks for a while, she asked me, "Would you like to go and join a small group of us down on Lake Erie in January and see about twenty different species of ducks?"

Now, over the course of my lifetime, and at that point, I hadn't seen twenty species of ducks, let alone in one day! So I said, "Sure!"

Since then, I've found so many wonderful opportunities and came from being just a nature lover and a person who loves to be outdoors, and perhaps later a birder, into someone who wants to preserve the natural world as well.

As part of the Ohio Young Birders Club, I got to travel to different parts of Ohio, which most of my friends had never seen. I got to see the beauty of it all.

I'm currently a third-year student in law school. So, although I didn't necessarily go into studying birds in the natural world as a biologist, I think I can do best policy-wise.

Diverse Biomes

[00:03:25]

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Not necessarily this area right here, actually you can hear the Lake very easily, but in certain spots you walk out and you see all of downtown Cleveland which is about two miles away. With all this change in views and whatever you feel like doing - being out in the countryside, or being next to a very large city - you can do either or.

Ongoing Birding Surveys

[00:04:07]

So, this right here is one of the green markers with which the surveyors led by Laura Gooch, all volunteers, come through here about once or twice a week, and sometimes even more, and stand for five minutes and count all the birds that are in this one area.

So, as you can see behind me we have Lake Erie, which, in April for example, and starting in November, you have a ton of Mergansers out there, Common Loons on occasion, so a very birdy spot for the Lake when the rest of the area is a bit more quiet.

They do their five minute surveys, record everything they see, and move on to the next marker. I'm not sure exactly how many there are, but I think there are sixteen or seventeen such markers throughout the whole park.

A Dynamic Environment

[00:04:56]

So, you have asked, "How long has this park been in existence?" So, the park itself, I believe for the past four years, has been open and accessible to the public. But this land area itself, has only been here since 1972, when the Cleveland Port Authority dredged the Cuyahoga River and dumped the silt into this enclosure.

Back in the 1970's, it was a primary site to see shorebirds flying through Cleveland. Lots of rarities flying in from Europe, for some reason, stopped in this particular area.

Of course that didn't last too long because by the 1980's it was turning into lots of fields and later, woodlands forming by the 1990's and 2000's.

So, a dynamic environment that is constantly changing.

Butterfly Field Hosts Interesting Sparrows Too

[00:05:40]

This is the butterfly field of Cleveland Nature Preserve. It's especially spectacular in June when the Black-eyed Susan's are growing everywhere and on occasion, you have those little Turkeys running about, all following their parents. A wonderful sight to see!

Right now, it's filled with Goldenrod and some migratory Monarchs. Truly a beautiful, unique area. Sometimes, closer to late October and November, people have found some very interesting sparrows here including Nelson's Sharptails and LeConte's, Clay-colored Sparrows, and a few others that are a bit more common as well.

So, a cool area to check out. In the summer for butterflies and summer breeding birds and in the fall for some of those rare sparrows.

Settings to Transport You

[00:06:30]

So, as we mentioned before, Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve has several different biomes. And several different settings that you can find yourself in. In walking out and seeing a pure, bucolic setting of fields and the sky, you can feel as if you are in the interior of the Ohio rural area.

You can walk out and all of a sudden see the Cleveland downtown area! See a yacht club! See a bunch of sail boats down on Lake Erie! So, whether you need a little bit more city in your life from a distance - or a little bit more of that rural setting - you can find both here.