



August 2020 Virtual Field Trip: **Nimisila Reservoir**

Bird Walk Leader: Michelle Brosius
WCAS Board Member and Field Trip Co-Coordinator

Nimisila Reservoir



Photo: Almost Sunset at Nimisila Reservoir by Tom Fishburn

Portage Lakes in Green, Ohio, consists of 13 bodies of water of which Nimisila Reservoir is the largest at 825 acres, 16 miles of shoreline, and the deepest spot being around 30 feet. It was built in 1936 by the federal Works Progress Administration to provide for the water needs of Akron's industrial complex.

Nimisila is an important stop-over habitat for migratory birds and is the staging area for several thousand Purple Martins during the month of August before they fly south for the winter.

[Summit Metro Parks Nimisila Reservoir](#), scroll down to History & Wildlife.

Target Species



Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)



“Putting up a Purple Martin house is like installing a miniature neighborhood in your backyard. In the East, dark, glossy-blue males and brown females will peer from the entrances and chirp from the rooftops all summer. In the West, martins mainly still nest the old-fashioned way—in woodpecker holes. Our largest swallows, Purple Martins perform aerial acrobatics to snap up flying insects. At the end of the breeding season they gather in big flocks and make their way to South America.”
– The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [Purple Martin](#)

*Photo: A Juvenile Purple Martin Flies Above
by Tom Fishburn*

Rare Bird



Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

Nimisila welcomed a special guest during the month of August, a juvenile Brown Booby! Not only is this a rare bird, but also a record bird as this is the first time the tropical migrant has been seen in Ohio. The Brown Booby was first spotted on Tuesday, August 25, most likely blown off course by a recent hurricane, and drew crowds of birders eager for a look until its unfortunate demise was confirmed on Friday, September 4.

For more information, please see [Tropical Bird Finds a Temporary Home in Northeast Ohio](#), wksu.org.



Photo: Favorite Pose: Brown Booby at Nimisila Reservoir
by Tom Fishburn

Rare Bird (cont.)



Brown Booby Overview

“Found in tropical oceans around the world, the Brown Booby is a dashing seabird—both in plumage, a natty brown-and-white (with bright yellow feet) and in flight style, which involves swift aerial maneuvers and deft dives. Brown Boobies do not nest on the United States mainland but often visit waters off Florida or California. They occasionally stray as far north as Canada, and sometimes well inland. Like most seabirds that nest on islands, Brown Boobies are very vulnerable to introduced predators such as rats, mice, and cats.” – The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [Brown Booby](#)



Photo: Brown Booby at Nimisila Reservoir by Tom Fishburn

Rare Bird (cont.)



Brown Booby Range

[Range map](#) by The Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



Nimisila Reservoir in
Green, Ohio

Joanne & Terry Gorges

17 Species



Joanne and Terry birded on **August 16**, 12 p.m. - 1:35 p.m.

On Sunday August 16, Terry and I went to both Portage Lakes State Park and Nimisila. At Portage Lakes we birded from noon until 12:30 p.m. The temperature was 75 degrees and it was overcast. Next we circled around Nimisila from 12:45 p.m. until 1:35 p.m. stopping at a number of the parking areas. It started out being overcast, then it did rain and the temperature dropped to 69 degrees. We also saw an Osprey nest in one of the utility towers at Nimisila.

Portage Lakes:

- 3 Mallard
- 1 Double-crested Cormorant
- 1 Turkey Vulture
- 3 Gull – species unknown
- 2 Mourning Dove
- 1 Belted Kingfisher
- 1 White-breasted Nuthatch
- 2 Chipping Sparrow
- 3 Northern Cardinal

Nimisila:

- 42 Double-crested Cormorant
- 4 Green Heron
- 2 Osprey
- 1 Hawk – species unknown
- 1 Spotted Sandpiper
- 13 Gull – species unknown
- 1 Mourning Dove
- 1 American Crow
- 1 Swallow – species unknown
- 1 Northern Cardinal
- 2 Common Grackle

Shaun Missig



This reservoir is absolutely beautiful. Plenty of wildlife, and scenery! I did complete this adventure in my kayak to capture the most amount of wildlife possible. On this trip I got to see an Osprey for the first time. This bird was fierce, but also quite beautiful. There was a nest in a tree at one of the points in the water. One would guard the young while the other would hunt for fish to eat. They are great at dive bombing their prey and catching them with their razor sharp claws.



Photo: Osprey Nest by Shaun Missig



Photo: Osprey in Flight by Shaun Missig

Shaun Missig (cont.)



I also encountered a Pied-billed Grebe for the first time as well. I thought it may have been a juvenile mallard, but after doing some research, that was incorrect. I did happen to capture some of the sunset that night as well, and it wasn't the most colorful sunset I have seen, but it certainly didn't disappoint.

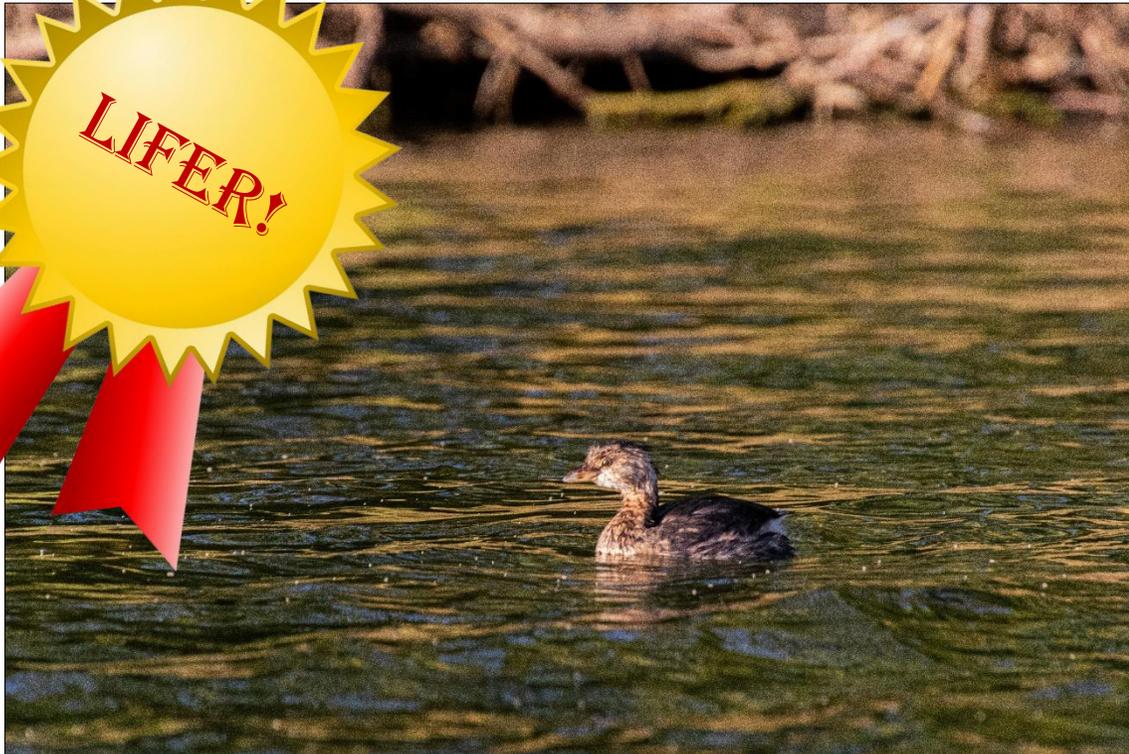


Photo: Pied-billed Grebe by Shaun Missig



Photo: Sunset by Shaun Missig

Shaun Missig (cont.)



The Purple Martins came out very close to dark and there were thousands of them! At one point I was paddling to reposition my kayak and they were flying fairly close to me. I felt as if I was in the helicopter at the end of Jurassic Park with the pterodactyl's flying along side. The moment was truly surreal, and unlike anything I had ever experienced! After most (if not all) the Purple Martins had landed in the reeds for the evening, the noise they were making was immense. It all blended together and almost sounded like a flowing river or waterfall. I had an amazing time on this trip, and will definitely be going back to the reservoir for more kayaking and photography adventures!



Photo: Purple Martins Close to Water by Shaun Missig



Photo: Purple Martins Cluster by Shaun Missig

Michelle Brosius



Michelle visited Nimisila on **August 21.**

I visited Nimisila with the Northeast Ohio (NEO) Ladies Adventure Group for their Purple Martins Paddle event. It was a gorgeous night; probably one of the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen in my life. Sharing that experience with a group of nature- and adventure-loving ladies, including my best friend since high school, was surreal and restorative to the soul.

Notable birds seen that evening include Purple Martins, Osprey, and a Bald Eagle!



Photo: Kayaking Nimisila at Sunset by Michelle Brosius

Michelle Brosius (cont.)



We paddled through a patch of lotus blossoms on our way to the reeds where the Purple Martins come in to roost.



Photo: Nimisila Lotus Flowers by Aimee Pierson



Photo: Nimisila Lotuses at Sunset by Michelle Brosius

Michelle Brosius (cont.)



Photos: Nimisila Lotus Leaf by Michelle Brosius

Water beading on the surface of lotus leaves is known as the “lotus effect”. This is a self-cleaning property that is a result of the leaves having a bumpy surface area made of water-repellent wax crystals. Any dirt, fungal spores, bacteria, or algae is picked up by the water droplets that cannot adhere to the surface of the leaf and as the water droplets roll off the leaf the contaminants are carried away with them.

See The University of Wisconsin Madison’s [The Lotus Effect](#) for more information.

Michelle Brosius (cont.)



Once through the lotuses, the sun had set providing a spectacular view. We headed toward the reeds and I was confused by what sounded like rushing water or a waterfall, and soon realized it was THEM! The Purple Martins! Thousands of them in the reeds.

They started swarming, darting through the air after their prey insects all around us. My camera was useless in the low light, but some things are best preserved in memory.



Photo: Nimisila Sunset Beyond the Lotuses by Michelle Brosius

Allen Rand



AI birded on **August 22.**

I visited Nimisila on Saturday, August 22. It was by luck that I was invited by a friend to join her out on the water with her canoe club, the [Ohio Historical Canoe Route Association \(OHCRA\)](#).



Photo: Shove Off by Al Rand

Allen Rand (cont.)



My day started around 2:30 p.m. at parking lot C5. It was hot and not many people were out. In addition to birds, there were plenty of other things to see. A giant snapping turtle prowling around, frogs jumping into the water with almost every step, catfish with huge gapes sucking up vegetation and algae from the surface of the water (the sound was otherworldly) and dragonflies depositing eggs in open patches of water. After about an hour, I went down the road to the C6 parking area. Not much was happening as it was still early in the afternoon, but the Ospreys didn't seem to mind. No less than three (3) were out and about. After a brief stop at parking area C7, I retraced my steps back to the C4 parking/camping area to meet up with my friend. We did a loop of the area and checked out some of the unofficial trails. A small boggy patch behind a derelict basketball hoop was a goldmine. I got a good look at a Yellow-throated Vireo and a Canada Warbler in non-breeding plumage amongst the usual suspects. The real magic happened at dusk.



Photo: Osprey at Nimisila by Tom Fishburn

Allen Rand (cont.)



Photo: Reed Beds by Al Rand

We pushed off in kayaks from the C4 boat ramp at about 7:00 p.m. and paddled out to the reed beds about 0.25mi into the reservoir. Double-crested Cormorants and Ring-billed Gulls were flying by at almost eye level. After checking out several options we "parked" by some canoe club members my friend knew. They reported the area was a good place to watch the Purple Martins as they came in to roost. An American Coot didn't seem to mind all the company. The Purple Martins slowly started to show up about 30 minutes before sunset, 5-10 at first, then 50-100 and before you knew it there were thousands. They looked like clouds of insects from a distance, but easily recognized through my binoculars. One of the Osprey's felt left out and joined them for a few laps around the reservoir before heading off for the night. A Bald Eagle flew over shortly after sunset completely disinterested in the spectacle, but created a great deal of excitement by the spectators near us on the water. Then the Purple Martins stole the show.

Allen Rand (cont.)



The smaller individual "clouds" coalesced into one large cloud over the water; there were easily 10,000 of them. They flew all over the place until the time was right. The cloud began to swirl like a bird tornado over the reed beds until a few decision makers dropped into the reeds. The rest followed; they were stacked 2, 3, 4 to a reed! Surprisingly, they were relatively quiet while on the wing, but the reed beds were alive after they landed. It sounded as if a full stadium of people were shaking paper bags all at the same time. Another interesting twist was that no one got splattered on, you'd think you'd get covered with that many birds flying directly overhead. We headed back to shore before it got too dark to see because the show was about over at that time. During the paddle back there appeared to be a Common Nighthawk swooping up some of the insects that remained in the air, but it was too dark to get a positive ID. There was good viewing from the C6 parking area, but being on the water just feet from the reed beds made it a real treat.



Photo: Sunset by Al Rand

Allen Rand (cont.)

37 Species



C5 Parking Area:

- Canada Goose
- Wood Duck
- Mallard
- Great Blue Heron
- Osprey
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Eastern Kingbird
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Blue Jay
- American Crow
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Barn Swallow
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

- Gray Catbird
- Cedar Waxwing
- American Goldfinch

C6 Parking Area:

- Mourning Dove
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Ring-billed Gull
- Osprey
- Eastern Phoebe
- Eastern Kingbird
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Gray Catbird
- American Goldfinch
- Song Sparrow

C4 Parking Area:

- Ring-billed Gull
- Osprey
- Downy Woodpecker
- American Crow
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- Gray Catbird
- Song Sparrow
- Northern Cardinal

Campground and Boat Ramp (and from the water):

- Canada Goose
- Mallard

- Chimney Swift
- American Coot
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Osprey
- Cooper's Hawk
- Bald Eagle
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Eastern Phoebe
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo
- American Crow

Allen Rand (cont.)



Campground and Boat Ramp (and from the water):

- Purple Martin
- Barn Swallow
- Gray Catbird
- American Robin
- American Goldfinch
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Canada Warbler
- Northern Cardinal



Photo: Purple Martins at Nimisila Reservoir by Tom Fishburn

Gloria Ferris



Gloria visited Nimisila on **August 28.**

On Thursday August 28th, my friend Georgia and I decided it was a good day to join the WCAS Virtual Field Trip at Lake Nimisila. So, an hour before dusk we began the trek down I-77 to Green Township in the Portage Lakes.

What a beautiful day for a road trip. The temperature was moderate, the sky was clear and the breeze was cool. Little did we know that our adventure would be more than watching the graceful Purple Martins skim the waters catching mosquitoes for their evening meal.



Photo: Purple Martin by Tom Fishburn

I grew up on a small farm in Wayne County, Ohio and Georgia was a farmgirl from South Dakota. She didn't grow up watching Purple Martins like I did, but she was a bird watcher when she lived on the Plains.

After exploring various roads within the park, we hit the sweet spot of where the birds would be. We disembarked and quickly saw that we were unprepared for the event. People were unloading kayaks and canoes. People were wearing binoculars and cameras with huge telephoto lenses around their necks while carrying a tripod or spotting telescope. There we were with one pair of binoculars and a pocket canon digital camera.

Gloria Ferris (cont.)



Georgia said, "Good Heavens, Gloria, we look like a couple of pikers. We don't even have folding chairs!" Soon, we would realize it didn't even matter. While we stood there knee deep in poison ivy watching the acrobatic, graceful birds swoop down from the sky to catch their evening dinner, I looked up and to the North.

A beautiful brown bird flew to the East. A bird neither one of us had ever seen. We puzzled as to what it might be. We knew a lot of what it wasn't.



Photo: Brown Booby by Tom Fishburn

For us, the Purple Martins became a backdrop to a birding mystery. The next morning I woke up and the mystery was solved. Photographer and Naturalist Tom Fishburn had a gorgeous array of the very same brown bird we saw on Facebook, and he had identified it as a Brown Booby that was blown North by strong hurricane winds. Who knew that our first venture back to the birding of our youth, we would have such an exciting story to tell. We were two of a select group to spot and watch the Brown Booby explore unfamiliar territory. Now, here we both are with a life bird anticipating our next adventure.

Mary Ann & John Henderson

31 Species



Mary Ann and John birded on **September 5, 7:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.**



Photo: Pied-billed Grebe by Tom Fishburn

- 2 Canada Goose
- 1 Wood Duck
- 11 Mallard
- 6 Pied-billed Grebe
- 2 American Coot
- 7 Ring-billed Gull
- 10 Double-crested Cormorant
- 1 Great Blue Heron
- 2 Turkey Vulture
- 2 Osprey
- 1 Bald Eagle
- 1 Red-tailed Hawk
- 1 Belted Kingfisher
- 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker
- 2 Downy Woodpecker
- 1 Northern Flicker
- 1 Eastern Wood-Pewee
- 1 Eastern Phoebe
- 4 Warbling Vireo
- 1 Red-eyed Vireo
- 6 Blue Jay
- 3 American Crow
- 3 Black-capped Chickadee
- 10 Purple Martin
- 1 White-breasted Nuthatch
- 2 Carolina Wren
- 3 Gray Catbird
- 2 House Finch
- 1 American Goldfinch
- 1 warbler sp. (Parulidae sp.)
- 3 Northern Cardinal

Tom Fishburn



Tom visited Nimisila on **August 8 & August 29.**

Cindy and I got there just around 8:00 p.m. after taking the scenic route 😊. We had started mid-afternoon stopping at or driving through several spots (Furnace Run, Wood Hollow in northern Summit County, West Branch in Portage County, the south-west part of Berlin Reservoir in Stark County, and back in Summit County to Winged Foot and Springfield Bog) before Nimisila. We like road trips!

I used two cameras at Nimisila. One on a tripod to catch the sunset and distant huge flock of martins, and one with my 400mm telephoto lens to get some closer-up shots. It's my 400mm lens that's made for photographing birds in flight with a superior auto-focus. I caught a little sunlight on some of the closer birds. Photographing towards the west with the sun setting is a challenge. It did help that I found a spot a little to the north of the east bank where I could see birds more toward the south. The skies were not as full of color as it was when I went two years ago. Much fewer clouds this time.

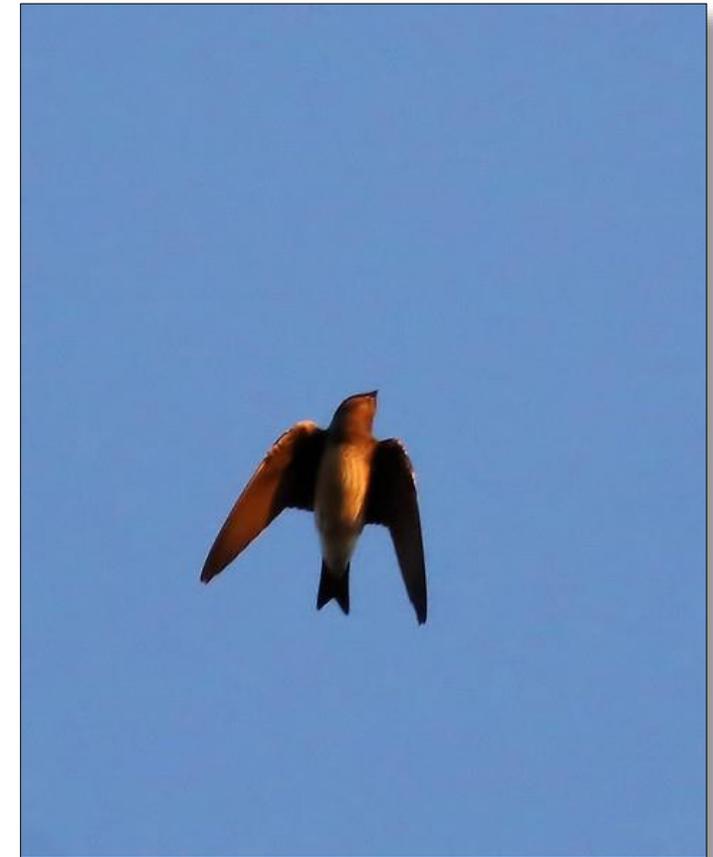


Photo: Purple Martin by Tom Fishburn

Tom Fishburn



A flock of Red-winged Blackbirds fly over Nimisila Reservoir in Summit County.



*Photo: Red-winged Blackbirds at Nimisila Reservoir
by Tom Fishburn*

A pair of Purple Martins catch the sun just before sunset.



Photo: Pair of Purple Martins by Tom Fishburn

Tom Fishburn (cont.)



Humans, too, are staging to watch the Purple Martins arrive on a beautiful summer evening at Nimisila.



Photo: Boaters at Nimisila by Tom Fishburn

... and an Osprey flies by over the reservoir.



Photo: Osprey in Flight by Tom Fishburn

Tom Fishburn (cont.)



Thousands of Purple Martins gather as they prepare for their travels to South American wintering grounds. The numbers increase in the distance in the vicinity of the reeds.

Photo: Purple Martins by Tom Fishburn

Tom Fishburn (cont.)

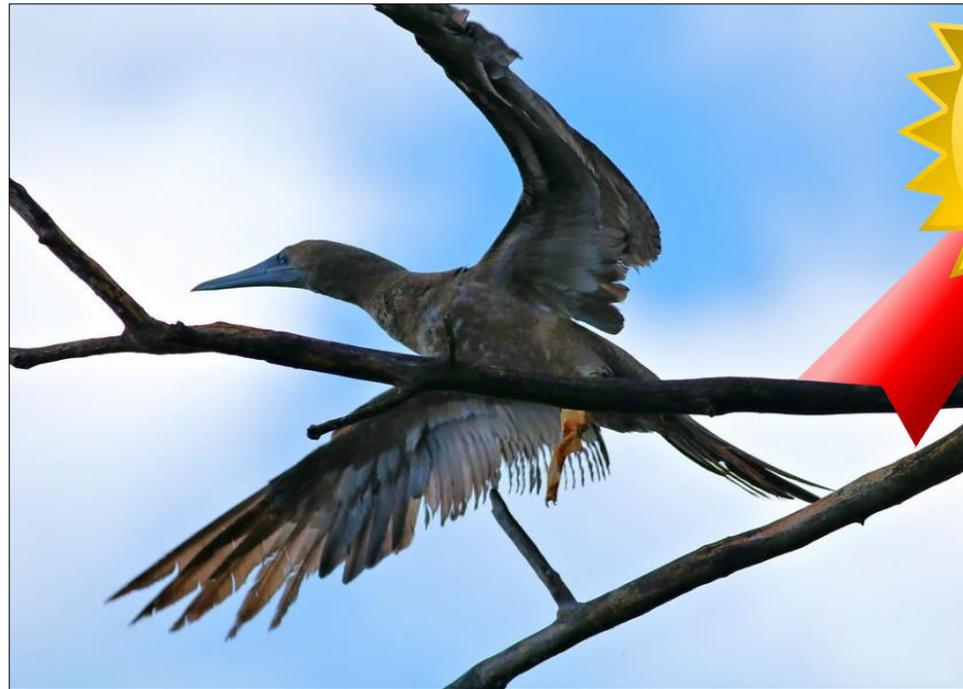


Tom returned on **August 29** for the **Brown Booby**.

The Brown Booby on its perch.



After an hour on its perch the Brown Booby takes to the air to feed further out on the lake.



The Brown Booby plunges into Nimisila Reservoir.



Photos: Juvenile Brown Booby by Tom Fishburn

Tom Fishburn (cont.)



Back on its perch. The young Brown Booby was more animated during this second hour while I observed it from only twenty yards away.



A wing stretch...



During nesting their webbed feet provide heat to eggs.



Photos: Juvenile Brown Booby by Tom Fishburn

Thank you!



Photo: Nimisila Sunset by Michelle Brosius

Tom Fishburn
Joanne & Terry Gorges
Shaun Missig
Aimee Pierson
Al Rand
Gloria Ferris
Mary Ann & John Henderson

&

Summit County Metro Parks for Nimisila Reservoir!

Nimisila Reservoir, Lot C6
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