

Marsh

Mentor wetlands park great for birdwatching

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It got its name because the early settlers did not know that robins migrated south in the spring. They thought the birds buried themselves until spring.

The Carl and Mary Newhous Overlook has a short handi-capped-accessible trail. It leads to an overlook offering views of the western half of the wetlands. That includes a pretty pond.

Wake Robin and Newhous are off Woodbridge Road. It runs west off Corduroy Road on the north side of Mentor Marsh.

The two-mile-long Zimmerman Trail runs on a hummocky ridge at the northeast side of the marsh.

It stretches from Mentor's Morton Park to the northeast, and to Headlands Beach State Park on the Mentor-Painesville Township line.

You will pass some of the preserve's biggest oak trees along the blue-blazed Zimmerman Trail, which is also part of the cross-Ohio Buckeye Trail. It is the toughest trail in the preserve.

You can access the Zimmerman Trail off Headlands Drive and Rosemary Lane.

The preserve is especially popular with bird watchers in the spring and fall.

That's because northbound

birds getting ready to cross Lake Erie stop and refuel on seeds and nectar on the south shore before crossing the lake.

Conversely, southbound birds need to refuel in the fall after crossing the lake before they proceed farther south.

Seeing 150 species per day is not uncommon.

How the marsh grew

Change has been gradual along the old riverbed.

The channel was turned into a thriving marsh with submerged aquatic plants. It slowly filled with organic debris; grasses including cattails, sedges and rushes took hold. Eventually a swamp forest with pin oak, red maple, alder and ash grew around the edge of the central swamp.

Mentor Marsh then had more open water and cattails. A salt mine spill in 1963 altered the chemistry of Mentor Marsh. Salt-tolerant reed grass became the dominant species. The marsh is still brackish, with salt leaching into the wetland, said manager Charlotte McCurdy.

The grass became fuel for a fire that swept across 320 acres of the western marsh in April 2003. The reed grass rebounded quickly, and the fire caused only minor damage to the swamp forest remnant.

In 1960, there was a plan to dredge the marsh and create docks, picnic areas and playgrounds.

That plan came under fire from local activists, including William Schnee (the museum director), Harold Zimmerman

(president of the Burroughs Nature Club), the Nature Conservancy and the Holden Arboretum.

Mentor Marsh, a designated National Natural Landmark, was dedicated as a state nature preserve in 1973.

The marsh flanks the Mentor Headlands residential area and sits east of 450-acre Mentor Lagoons Nature Preserve, a facility owned by the city of Mentor.

Visitors are asked to stay on designated trails. Pets and bicycles are prohibited.

Hours: daylight to dark daily.

Be warned: Mosquitoes are part of the marsh environment. From late May and until the first fall frost, long-sleeved shirts and pants and insect repellent are recommended.

To get to Mentor Marsh from Akron, take state Route 8 north to Interstate 271. Head north on I-271 and continue to the east toward Erie, Pa., on I-90. Exit at the state Route 44/Mentor exit. Take state Route 44 north of Lake Shore Boulevard (state Route 283). Turn left and proceed 3½ miles on Lake Shore. Proceed to Corduroy Road. Turn right and go a half mile.

The nature center will be on your right. It is open from noon to 5 p.m. on weekends from April 1 through Oct. 31, and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the first Sunday of the month the rest of the year, with programs at 2 p.m. Call 440-257-0777 for more information.

Bike tour

The 18th annual Great Ohio Bicycle Adventure will be held

June 17-24 in southwest Ohio.

The 265-mile family bicycle tour will begin and end in Xenia with stops in Wilmington, Hillsboro, Circleville and London.

Participants will pedal 45 to 60 miles a day and camp at stops along the route. Two additional, optional loops are available for riders.

The entry deadline is May 17 or when the ride reaches capacity of 3,000 riders.

The fee is \$170 for adults and \$85 for children 6 to 15.

For information, call 614-273-0811, Ext. 1, or write to GOBA, 1525 Bethel Road, Suite 100, Columbus OH 43220. The Internet site is www.goba.com.

Park skiing

Pennsylvania's Parker Dam State Park near Penfield will hold cross-country ski treks at 1 p.m. today and again Feb. 25-26.

Meet at the park office. Limited equipment is available for use. Call to reserve equipment or bring your own. The program will be postponed if there is no snow. Call 814-765-0630.

Presque Isle fun

Pennsylvania's Presque Isle State Park near Erie will host a snowshoe hike at 6 p.m. Wednesday, a cross-country ski trek at 10:30 a.m. Saturday and a snowshoe hike at 1 p.m. Feb. 25. Call 814-833-7424.

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