

2000 CWS Birdathon A-Team

- Geoff Holroyd, Sarah, Amy and Helen Trefry and Gerry McKeating

Our 2000 Baillie Birdathon was full of youthful enthusiasm which must replace the wisdom of age. Our leader, Gerry McKeating was called to Ottawa! How could we manage without our expert birder, never mind chauffeur. Then, I found out that I had to travel to southern Alberta on the Birdathon afternoon to study burrowing owls. Obviously, creative remedial action was required. How did we do this year? How did we overcome these obstacles? Read on.

Sarah and Amy Trefry were eager to be on this year's CWS team. We also set a target of 100 species for our Birdathon. No point in being greedy and failing. Much better to set an achievable goal (I must have learned that lesson in a management course or from appraisals!). Mom, Helen, agreed to start the Birdathon on Friday evening, albeit on horseback with her daughter. By nightfall they had recorded 36 species - a great start. I arrived at the Trefry's at the incredibly early hour of 7:30 am. Phil had coffee ready; hey, how did those donuts get on my front seat. Well I had to be sociable, so we had coffee and planned our route! At 7:54 we were off on rural roads near the Trefry farm. The first thing we heard was wood frogs. A quick check of our bird list confirmed that they were not on the list, so we ignored them. Oops, we did not have last night's bird list, so we started our list afresh. We would compare our list at the end of the day with last nights.

By 8:15, barely 21 minutes into the count we had 26 species. At this rate we would be home by coffee break to finish the donuts, if Phil hadn't eaten them already! By 8:54 we had 50 species, all in only one hour. Too bad that the next 50 weren't as easy. Rally driver Amy was at the wheel able to get us anywhere we wanted, quickly.

By 11:10 we hiked trails at Islet Lake Staging Area of the Blackfoot reserve and added 23 species. One highlight was Great-crested Flycatcher, 4 of them. The weep of the flycatcher reminded me of this species in my youth in Ontario, amazing recall. One flycatcher perched in full view to allow us to confirm my identification, not that we really needed to, and to give Sarah and Amy a good look. As we drove past the ice cream store in Tofield (yes we did drive past and not stop!) at 11:30, we saw Purple Martins, our 78th species. Only 22 more to meet our goal.

A soaring Swainson's Hawk flew over. This prairie hawk was another bonus, not seen every day in the Tofield area. Francis Point turned out to be a bust. Only Vesper Sparrow and Mountain Bluebird were added to our list. Kallel Pond/Field was not flooded this spring because of the lack of runoff during the melt. I did not expect to get our usual Bobolinks and we didn't. But we were happily surprised by a singing Sprague's Pipit somewhere above in the clouds.

Amisk Creek proved more productive with 5 new species - Canvasback, Wilson's Phalarope, Cliff Swallow, Western Meadowlark, and Common Yellowthroat. We were at 87 species, closing in on our goal. At Lister Creek we saw a Northern Harrier and Ring-billed Gull, both common species that had alluded us until then. At Ryley, most of the usual ponds were dry due to the low winter runoff; was our Birdathon suffering due to Climate Change? We did see an exotic Rock Dove (!) our 90th species, ten to go but we were running out of time. It was 1 pm and lunch and a drive to Brooks were waiting. A stop at Tofield's Mom's Ice Cream helped but not our species total.

Time for a recount. Wow, just like elections, we under-counted, well actually I under counted, and we actually had 92 species. Back in the Trefry Kitchen we reviewed the Friday evening list and found four species that we had not seen on Saturday; 96 and still breathing.

Helen and I headed south while sharp-eyed Sarah and Amy kept looking at the farm and were rewarded with a Common Raven overhead; 97 species. On our drive south we saw 9 additional species including: a

Burrowing Owl (of course), Marbled Godwit, Least Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, Willet, Prairie Falcon, American Kestrel, Short-eared Owl, and Bank Swallow.

We had reached our goal of over 100 species, 106 to be exact! That brings the tales of the 2000 Birdathon to an end. We thank you for your support of this birding adventure and hope you enjoyed reading about it.

PS: Mammals and Amphibians seen and heard: Coyote, Richardson's Ground Squirrel, and Wood Frog.