

## **THE PRES**

Lisa and Chuck Priestley

This year's Baillie Birdathon was one for unusual sightings. We decided to stick around Edmonton instead of travelling far and wide this year, as we were both busy with work and wedding plans!

We headed to the edge of the city and almost forgot to count the Rock Doves and a Black-billed Magpie; being that they are so common we tend to forget about these species. A beautiful adult Red-tailed Hawk was perched along a row of trees. It flew off just before we could drop a trap! While we were putting the trap away though, a Yellow Warbler called from the willows along the road, definitely a sign that spring was here.

We arrived at the first wetland, affectionately called Gill's Pond, after Chuck's mom. A Tree Swallow flew across the road and into a nest box along the fence line. We raised our binoculars to find a good variety of waterfowl species such as Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, and American Coot. The male Red-winged Blackbirds were advertising their bright red epaulettes, trying to attract females. What really was surprising was the large number of Wilson's Phalaropes that we saw throughout the birdathon. These ones were swimming in circles churning up aquatic insects to eat.



***Blue-winged Teal***

Cawes Lake just a short distance from the first pond, had great mudflats along the north side, and we were excited to see shorebirds feeding along the shallow waters. We added Long-billed Dowitcher, Western Sandpiper, Semi-palmated Plover, and large flocks of Stilt Sandpipers. Chuck was able to pick a Red-necked Phalarope out of a group of Wilson's. Other species recorded included Northern Pintail, Black Tern, Green-winged Teal, Redhead, Eared Grebe, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Chuck observed a rusty looking duck with blue specula fly over the road, "I'm sure that was a Cinnamon Teal," he said, but we could not count it until I saw it as well, those are the rules we set up.



***Cinnamon Teal***

We drove to the south end of the lake, and as we were setting the spotting scope up, a Least Flycatcher announced its presence from the forest behind us. A Ruddy Duck was displaying his tail to a female, and we tracked down two Black-necked Stilts. The wind was strong making it difficult to hear much, but a Sora managed to call loud enough to be detected.

That mystery bird that I had not seen earlier was begging a second look, so we headed back to where Chuck had seen it fly across the road. And sure enough, a Cinnamon Teal flew up out of the marsh across the way and landed in a dugout. To add to that, as we scanned the dugout, we picked out a female Hooded Merganser.

We moved on to Hastings Lake, thinking we could find Great Blue Herons without a problem. Double-crested Cormorants were on nests, but not a single heron could be found. We saw Western Grebes, American White Pelicans, Common Terns, and Pectoral Sandpipers. Next we headed up to highway 21 and Wye Road where there had been a record of a Pacific Loon. Although the loon was not found, the lake did disappoint. We observed Horned Grebe, Spotted Sandpiper, Common Merganser, Brewer's Blackbird, Barrow's Goldeneye, and FINALLY we saw a Great Blue Heron!!

We drove through Fort Saskatchewan and up towards Opal. A pond just north of the Fort had some more species we hadn't recorded yet, Marbled Godwit and a WHIMBREL (very exciting, as it was a lifer for both of us).



***Whimbrel***

In the forests near Opal, we quietly listened for begging calls, and as we tracked them down we found ourselves under a Great Gray Owl nest, the female perched about 20 feet up in a spruce tree next to it. After snapping a few dozen photos we were about to head out when a Northern Goshawk swooped down at the owl!!! As we

made our way out we added Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-headed Vireo, and Pine Siskins to our list. A check on a second nest box revealed a Northern Saw-whet Owl female poking her head out. We ended that foray with a Tennessee Warbler near the truck.

As we arrived in Edmonton, we added Swainson's Hawk along the Whitemud freeway, one dark phase, and another regular phase. That would finish us for the day, but we vowed to add some more species the next morning, we were still missing some key species, and we were only at 82.

On Sunday we headed back to Cawes Lake to see if we could add a few more shorebirds. Chuck picked a Mourning Dove out perched in a tree. The lake was alive with birds again and with the light winds it was easy to hear a Common Snipe doing its breeding flight overhead. We added Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, California Gull, and two Northern Harriers that were flying over the cattails in search of food.



**Belted  
Kingfisher**

A short time later we were in town at Tim Horton's (no not for donuts), to look for the Peregrine Falcons that nest on the Clinical Sciences Building at the University of Alberta. The female was on the nest, but the male must have been out hunting.

It was 10:00 a.m. and we rushed over to Whitemud Creek for a walk through old mixed wood forest. A Belted Kingfisher was a surprise along the creek. Our walk was fruitful as we added White-winged Crossbill, Western Tanager, Blue Jay, American Tree Sparrow, Evening Grosbeak, and Purple Finch. We were at 98 species!!! Only two more to reach 100. Chuck suggested a trip up to Jim Butler's neighbourhood; perhaps we could add a Merlin or Junco. Well, we did add a Swainson's Thrush, and can you believe we were stuck at 99 species. No luck finding another one before the end of the 24 hours. Perhaps we could add that Short-eared Owl we saw the night before we started the Baillie . . . no?? Well, that's that, another Baillie Birdathon come and gone.