

The Birding Buddies Baillie Birdathon 2003

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Our goal was to top the 100 species mark. There were four people in our Birding Buddies team, Bryn Spence, Juanita Mumby, Chuck Priestley and yours truly. Our first stop was Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park and surrounding area.

We arrived the evening of May 24, set up camp, and started the count at 9 p.m. A few late evening callers announced their presence: [White-throated Sparrow](#), [Yellow Warblers](#), a [Hermit Thrush](#) and a [Chipping Sparrow](#).



Driving the Loop Road, we stopped at a lake lookout point observed a group of [Double-crested Cormorants](#) flying across the sky. Two [Common Goldeneye](#) males were courting a female, and an [American Crow](#) croaked as it flew over. We headed out along the road off the island an [American Widgeon](#) was spotted, and we were surprised to see a pair of [Red-breasted Mergansers](#) (left) floating along the edge of the lake. A species we had not expected, so this was encouraging. As we turned to head into Lac La Biche to get some gas, an [Osprey](#) flew over, species # 12 and our first raptor of the trip. A great pull out spot along the lake produced: [Gadwall](#), [Canvasback](#), [Mallard](#), [Bufflehead](#) (right), and [Red-necked Grebe](#). A [Great Blue Heron](#) was also spotted lurking in cattails, and along with [Red-winged Blackbirds](#).



With a full tank of gas, we headed up the Shaw Lake Road to try and hoot for some owls. Our first stop gave us two new species: a [Solitary Sandpiper](#) called and a male [Common Snipe](#) performed his territorial flight, diving down through the air causing the outer tail feathers to vibrate, producing a hollow whistling sound. No owls here. Two more stations of calling and we were all getting tired. Time to hit the hay and get some sleep for tomorrow's birding marathon.

The morning arrived quickly (6:30 a.m.), and judging from the moans and groans when the alarm went off, everyone wanted to play turtle and bird from the comfort of the tents. The birds were calling from everywhere, making it a challenge to pick our different species. As we packed up camp at 7 a.m., I picked out a [Blackpoll Warbler](#), [Common Yellowthroat](#) Black-capped chickadee, and an [American Robin](#).



We checked out the lake again, and scanned the shoreline and the trees. We then we spotted a white head ... which could only belong to one thing, [Bald Eagle](#)!! While looking through the binoculars a bird flew through our site, and we pulled away from our lenses to see a [Bank Swallow](#) dive down into a nest site. As we searched the shrubs along



the edge of the lookout, a [Myrtle Warbler](#) was also spotted. Some [White Pelicans](#) foraged on fish at an eddy at the end of the point, and [Mourning Dove](#) cooed softly to us as we headed on to the Boardwalk Trail, the next stop on our search.

Species number 34 was the Least Flycatcher, and the species just started adding up. As we walked the trail through the dense forest we heard and saw: [Magnolia Warbler](#), [American Redstart](#), [Ruby-crowned Kinglet](#), [Black-throated Green Warbler](#), [Winter Wren](#), [Boreal Chickadee](#), [Red-eyed Vireo](#), and [Blue-headed Vireo](#). A [Ruffed Grouse](#) drummed on a log in the distance. Next we heard a [Brown-headed Cowbird](#), then a [Baltimore Oriole](#), and then the faint sound of the [Golden-crowned Kinglet](#). A [Swainson's Thrush](#) not only called, but jumped out along the trail to show its all brown back with the spotted chest to us. The sound of 'pitapek' gave us the [Western Tanager](#), and a [Hairy Woodpecker](#) was heard drumming and then seen along the trunk of an aspen tree. As we came out to the lake, Bryn and I both heard a wail in the distance, and Chuck put the scope on a [Common Loon](#), which really is never very common in my opinion.



It took us till 11:30 a.m. to get to Lac La Biche, as the birds all seemed to jump out to be counted: [Clay-colored Sparrow](#), [Barn Swallow](#), [Savannah Sparrow](#), [Western Grebe](#), [White-winged Scoters](#), [Killdeer](#), [Blue and Green-winged Teal](#). We hit mainland, and we added [American Kestrel](#) and [Brewer's Blackbird](#) before we reached Subway for some sandwiches.

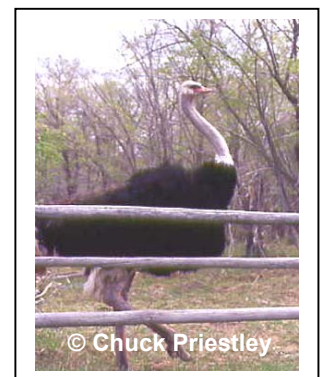
Lac La Biche to Elk Island

We finished lunch quickly, and as we hopped back in the truck we heard [House Sparrows](#) chirping across the street . . . yep they count too. Along the south shore we added [Black and Common Terns](#), [Canada Goose](#), [Redhead](#), [Ruddy Duck](#), and [Sora](#). From there, we headed out of Lac La Biche along Secondary Highway 663 towards Boyle. A few ponds along the route produced [Bonaparte's Gull](#) and [Ring-necked Duck](#). I was suggesting we should keep an eye open for [Gray Jay](#), and one flew out along the side of the highway. We also saw a [Gray Catbird](#)!! Another species we did not anticipate.

By the time we reached the gates of Elk Island National Park we had added [Eastern Phoebe](#), [Red-tailed Hawk](#), [Cliff Swallow](#), and [Mountain Bluebird](#). We thought about counting the Ostrich at a roadside farm, but we figured no one would believe we saw a wild one. Ah well, it was something to consider if we were stuck for species 100.

Elk Island

We drove on to the west side Astotin Lake as Chuck thought he knew of a place we might see Trumpeter Swans, but no luck. Though we did add [Warbling Vireo](#) and [Northern Shoveler](#).



Our time was dwindling, and we had to hurry. Final stop in the park was Tawayik Lake. A short walkabout netted us [Downy Woodpecker](#), [Rose-breasted Grosbeak](#), [American Goldfinch](#), [Marbled Godwit](#), [Lesser Yellowlegs](#), [Stilt Sandpiper](#).

We drove out of the park counting a **Northern Flicker** as we turned towards Beaverhill Lake. We saw a **Merlin** perched atop a fence post near Tofield, and as we headed down Rowan's Route we observed the ever-present **Swainson's Hawks** near Francis Point. **Great Horned Owls** were on a nest along the road, and as we scanned the fields for any other species as **Sprague's Pipit** called its descending song.

Amisk Creek At Amisk Creek we added **Wilson's Phalarope**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, **American Avocet**, **Willet**, **Pied-billed Grebe**, **Western Meadowlark**, **Pectoral Sandpiper**, and a nice adult male **Northern Harrier**.

Beaverhill Lake Natural Area

At the weir an **Eared Grebe** gave us our fourth grebe species of the count, and a **LeConte's Sparrow** also announced its presence. We arrived at the Beaverhill Bird Observatory to take a peak at a **Long-eared Owl** nest and listened to the **House Wrens** chattering away. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was species number 110!! **Western Wood-Pewee** and **Sharp-tailed Sparrow** added another two species.

It was then back into Tofield for "dinner" at Mom's Ice Cream Corral, banana splits all around (it has fruit and milk in it). We then went to the Beaverhill Lake Visitors Centre to check the **Purple Martin** house which appeared empty . . . but we lucked out to see one flying around. We then headed to the Strathcona Wilderness Center for our final species . . . a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** in a nestbox. A total of 114 species were observed, not bad day of birding!



The Birding Buddies (Lisa, Chuck, Bryn, and Juanita)