

Dear Birdathon Supporter

8 June 2002

Relaxed was the key word of the day on our 2003 Baillie Birdathon with no pressure to set records. After all, we were birding in June, well after the peak of migration. With few shorebirds and warblers left nesting in the area, we were not going to set any records. In fact could we see 100 species this late in the spring?

Turns out our goals for the day, were different: Geoff was hoping for 100 species; ambitious Pat set her sights on 110 species; and Gerry wanted to stop at Tim Hortons! Retirement does that to one, I hear.

We did not get going until 7am, two hours later than our usual start; a habit picked up by Gerry retired for one year. Our first stop was Whitemud ravine. The warm morning air gave no warning of the weather ahead. Whitemud did not yield a Western Tanager easily and never did provide a Rough-winged Swallow, another of the valley's specialities. Pat and Geoff flung our coats in the car at the trail head - big mistake. As we listened in vain for a Western Tanager and watched for a Rough-winged Swallow, the skies became darker and darker. Before long we looking at each other from under spruce trees providing protection for the morning downpour that was trying to turn the Aspen Parkland into Rainforest. Eventually, the rain let up and we poked back to the car. A Tanager, an ovenbird, and a late Yellow-rumped Warbler, sang as we retreated from the wet valley, and a Pileated Woodpecker flew and called across the valley. When we left the valley we had recorded 30 species.

With such a slow start, did our intrepid team panic? No, never. We headed to Tim Hortons along with about half of the city population, make that half of Canadians. Eventually we were loaded down with three coffees, a dozen donuts, and a couple of muffins. Obviously this was a new era in birding by the intrepid, but retiring (and I don't mean shy) CWS team. The cold rain had taken its toll early. Where was the +22C daily high that was predicted?

Off to Bretona Pond where we added lots of waterfowl, and a late Tennessee Warbler. An even colder stop at Cooking Lake had us checking the calender to see if it was June or March! As we left Cooking Lake we had our 60th species, a Savannah Sparrow. Last year we had 80 species by this hour, were we in trouble? Was our new relaxed approach to be our undoing? Would we be able to hold our heads high on Monday morning? It became apparent that we did not care as we leisurely headed east along highway 13.

At a random stop at a small slough we found a Common Loon to our surprise and delight. Finally at 11am we saw our first Red-tailed Hawk, mobbed by blackbirds. At another pond was a Common Grackle, our only one of the day.

We rolled up to the Trefry's farm, Upsandowns, with 71 species. Definitely time for tea and donuts, after finishing the coffee and muffins en route. Half an hour there yielded Cedar Waxwing. Helen had seen a Ruby-throated Hummingbird earlier, so we were at 74 species as we left.

On the way north to Islet Lake, we found 5 Trumpeter Swans hanging out on a small pond, much to the later excitement of Gerry Beyersbergen, who did not know of their whereabouts. A Great-crested Flycatcher called and a Downy woodpecker flew across an opening.

As we left Blackfoot Reserve a Goshawk soared over the road, our 85th species, but it was 1pm. The afternoon is typically slow for birds. What should a now desperate birding team do? We headed for lunch at the Trefry's! The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was eagerly pecking holes in the ornamental tree trunks, to Phil's frustration. Then off to Tofield.

Whoops, Mom's Ice Cream stand is open, a mandatory stop on all visits to town. Obviously this was a low stress birding outing.

Then to Francis Point where we did not have a chance of seeing the shore of the receding Beaverhill Lake. No Bobolinks at Kallal field, but Cliff Swallows and Marbled Godwit at Amisk Creek. Now at 95 species, but it was 3:30 already. At Lister Lake, the wind was way too loud to hear any Yellow Rails. With the afternoon slipping by Gerry headed to Mundare beach where we were able to confirm that the lake is drying up and the shorebird migration was long past! Time to pull out all stops to reach our goals - so Pat and I slept as Gerry drove on to their cabin!

A late White-fronted Goose and Pectoral Sandpiper helped us by remaining visible long enough for us to wake up and count them. Pat's sharp eyes spotted a male Northern Harrier - species 99!! Suddenly one goal was within reach. Gerry heard, then saw an Eastern Kingbird. We could relax, 100 species at 4:20.

A few species en route helped with our total, but at the McKeating-Crossley cabin, the feeders were EMPTY. Clearly, someone (not naming names) was not prepared for the birdathon! Trips to Washington had interfered with the feeder

filling schedule. The guaranteed Hairy Woodpecker, Purple Finch, and other feeder birds were not to be seen; starved out of the neighbourhood. A Solitary Sandpiper flyby and a late drumming Ruffed Grouse added to our list - 105 species. Pat declared that we were almost at her goal of 110 species, but it was 8:15 when we left, almost quitting time. Stops at ponds before the Yellowhead Highway, yielded Sora and Cinnamon Teal, 107 species and on hold.

As we parked near the Strathcona refineries watching for a nesting Peregrine Falcon, a call to Helen added Gray Partridge, Nighthawk and Great Blue Heron - 110 species; we had reached Pat's goal. As we congratulated ourselves, a Great Blue Heron flew over; don't have to cheat on that one ☺ Then a kestrel was mobbed by a blackbird - 111 species.

That brings the tales of the 2003 Birdathon to an end. We thank you for your support of this birding adventure and hope you enjoyed reading about it. Please send a cheque made payable to "Bird Studies Canada - Birdathon" to me (Geoff Holroyd, at Environment Canada or 4123 - 122 St, Edmonton, T6J 1Z1). Bird Studies Canada will send you a tax receipt for your donation. Thanks again for your support!!

Cheers

Your 2003 CWS Birdathon A-Team:
Pat Crossley, Gerry McKeating, Helen Trefry, and Geoff Holroyd.