

2020 Wallace Memorial Birdathon for Northumberland Land Trust

Jack van Nostrand Nature Reserve
May 23, 2020 - Richard Pope



Saturday, May 23, was not as birdy a day as I had hoped for. I had originally planned to do the birdathon on May 16, but it was too cold and there were too few birds when scouting on the 15th. So, after discussion with my able helper, Tom Jackman, I decided to wait for a week for things to warm up weather-wise and bird-wise.

We did better on May 23rd than we would have on the 16th, but there were fewer migrants than I had hoped for; warblers were particularly thin. Naturally I blame Tom Jackman, though some might consider this unjust. The fact that he diligently carried the scope all day, found some birds I might have missed, and was excellent company must not be used to exonerate him for failing to bring in those warblers the night before.

I birded from 4:30 am to 10:30 am and then again from 3:30 am to 9:30 am. Tom was with me all morning and from 4-6:30 pm. How many times we both ended up on the ground need not be recounted. Why give our enemies ammo? Older is better, as some young seem to think.

It was a beautiful, clear day. It went from 12 degrees C to 24 and back to 18 over the day. The wind was almost absent, and the lake was all but calm.

The van Nostrand property is a marvelous one for birds, and most of the 72 we recorded live on or around the property. Few were just passing through. At the end of the day we felt we had seen pretty well everything that was to be seen. Among the few birds we did not see that I had expected to see after scouting were the accursed American Woodcock (picture to right; formerly a favourite of mine, but no more), Great Egret, Common Gallinule, Barn Swallow, Mourning Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Indigo Bunting. Why these avians decided to abandon me I do not know. Otherwise, we feel we saw all here was to see on that day.



I began at 4:40 am with high hopes for American Woodcock. All the way from Cobourg I could hear them over the car. One *peented* so obscenely loudly right above my head whilst I was leaving Cobourg, that I was forced to practically swerve off the road to prevent the old in-one-window-out-the-other trick, which I did not feel up for at that

hour. The last *peent* was about 400 yards west of van Nostrand. I had already counted Woodcock on my mental list when I arrived. But I never heard another *peent* and did not hear one that evening either. A bitter miss. I know they were there, the

We began well. Veerys, Wood Thrushes, Northern Cardinals, and White-Throated Sparrows were singing madly in the pre-dawn and Great Crested Flycatchers were calling everywhere. These birds were omni-present all day and all were still going at it when I left at 9:30 pm.



The walk to the beach begins with Northern Waterthrush Alley where we were surrounded on all sides with loudly and persistently singing, dueling waterthrushes (left) that also sang all day without respite. We were pleased with a Virginia Rail in the swamp at the first Wood Duck box (put up by Tom & Co. earlier in the year) but did not get Least Bittern there until the trip back north from the lake. This was where I had Common Gallinule a week ago, but it was not to be found.

The lake did not produce as well as I had hoped; no shorebird activity (I expected Whimbrel flybys like the day before) and only a single loon (Red-throated Loon) and 3 species of duck - Long-tailed, Red-breasted Merganser and Greater Scaup (only 2), the first two in large rafts dotting the lake and still there at 6:00 pm. We had Caspian Tern, Herring and Ring-billed Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireo, American Redstart (right) and Yellow Warbler, but not the variety I had hoped for. We did have a close-range flyby from the American Bittern that had been pumping madly ever since our arrival at 4:30 am, which somewhat alleviated the pain of no warblers in the lakeside willows.



After an hour we retraced our steps northwards, birded right to Lakeshore Road and then east to the northeast property corner. From here we bushwhacked south to the marsh and then back west, a trip I'm given to understand was not the high point of my scope-bearer's day, though many would have died for a chance to accompany me on it. Come to think of it, he almost did die, but that's another story. The trip did, however, produce 1 Hairy Woodpecker and it was the noble scope-bearer himself who found it while looking up from a position best left undescribed - but those Marsh Marigolds really were lovely as they slowly closed over him.

Back at the car we had a snack and then birded the northwest quadrant until 10:30am. When we broke for the morning, we were stuck at a Heinz (57 varieties) and adding no new birds.

At home, I called Margaret who said things were relatively slow where she had been and reported that Doug McRae had done no better than us at the Chub Point Nature Reserve. I was, of course, very sorry McRae had not done better than us; there is, as you well know, no competition among birders. It is all good fun and camaraderie and one never gloats over another's travails - at least openly.

During the afternoon Tom and I birded the north side and the west side from Lakeshore to the lake and then back and worked the west road area. We got up to 68 species before Tom left to tend to his manurely duties at his wife's behest. They say



he is a good man around horse-manure and I don't doubt it, though I only have his wife's word to go by. He was mystified by my excited sighting of 2 Clay-coloured Swallows (68), though too polite to say anything. But he did keep asking me about them, until I finally told him I was just testing him and actually had seen 2 Northern Rough-winged Swallows (left). It was funny; he actually thought I had made a mistake in the name. Go figure, eh?

After Tom left, I got out the deck chair, cranked up the hearing aids, set up the scope and started the push to seventy - spurred on by the thought that every new bird was costing Ray Waring \$2 CDN and was hurting Kenny Burrell's bank book bad. When I realized I had 68 species, I set a goal of 70 before I went home, come what might.

A single cliff Swallow (right) was number 69. Chipping Sparrow was number 70. Not elegant, perhaps, but as my buddy, Hugh Currie, would say, a tick is a tick. House Sparrow and Elegant Trogon count the same on a species list. There was an agony of waiting. Where were all the bloody woodcocks? Nothing. Finally, by the grace of the one and only, 4 Purple Martins flew by. 71! Suddenly, 80 was in view, perhaps 100 to really round things out. You know, a few owls, a nightjar or two, and Bob's your uncle.



But it wasn't to be. 72 was a lone Common Nighthawk, just visible through the now growing storm of mosquitoes who were making up for their near absence all day long. By 9:30 p.m. I had definitively turned against American Woodcock as a species and said "to heck with it. I'm going home."

And I did.

[Editor's note: Richard also reported a River Otter on the property not long before his birdathon day, and a Black Bear on the property immediately to the west. JBG]

THE FULL LIST:

Canada Goose (8)
Mute Swan (3)
Wood duck (8)
Mallard (5)
Greater Scaup (2)
Long-tailed Duck (myriad)
Red-breasted Merganser (myriad)
Ruffed Grouse (1)
Red-throated Loon (1)
Common Loon (1)
Double-crested Cormorant (60)
American Bittern (2)
Least Bittern (2)
Great Blue Heron (1)
Turkey Vulture (4)
Red-tailed Hawk (1)
Virginia Rail (2)
Ring-billed Gull (75)
Herring Gull (20)
Caspian Tern (20)
Mourning Dove (1!)
Black-billed Cuckoo (1)
Common Nighthawk (1)
Belted Kingfisher (4)
Red-bellied Woodpecker (2)
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (1)
Downy Woodpecker (2)
Hairy Woodpecker (1)
Northern Flicker (4)
Pileated Woodpecker (2)
Eastern Wood-Pewee (1)
Least flycatcher (4)
Eastern Phoebe (1)
Great Crested Flycatcher (15)
Warbling Vireo (1)
Red-Eyed Vireo (1)
Blue Jay (20)
American Crow (40)
Common Raven (1)
Purple Martin (4)
Tree Swallow (1)
Northern Rough-winged Swallow (2)
Cliff Swallow (1)
Black-capped Chickadee (3)
House Wren (2)
Winter Wren (3)
Marsh Wren (10)
Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1)
Veery (10)
Wood Thrush (15)
American Robin (5)
Gray Catbird (1)
Brown Thrasher (4)
European Starling (1)
Ovenbird (1)
Northern Waterthrush (15)
Black-and-White Warbler (4)
Common Yellowthroat (12)
American Redstart (1)
Yellow Warbler (4)
Black-throated Green Warbler (1)
Chipping Sparrow (1)
Song Sparrow (10)
Swamp Sparrow (15)
White-throated Sparrow (20)
Northern Cardinal (6)
Bobolink (6)
Red-winged Blackbird (40)
Eastern Meadowlark (2)
Common Grackle (30)
Baltimore Oriole (4)
American Goldfinch (20)