

Wallace Memorial Birdathon 2020

McEwen Nature Reserve - Ben Walters - 2020 May 23



On May 23, 2020 I did my bird count on the McEwen Property beginning at 5:10 a.m. and ending at 9:20 p.m. In total I observed 69 species of birds. A few species were fly-overs (Ring-billed Gull, Turkey Vulture) and a few species nest on the neighbouring property (Eastern Meadowlark, Barn Swallow), but forage on the McEwen property. I didn't observe any obvious migrants this year.

I arrived just as dawn broke and entered the south field listening to American Robins, Baltimore Orioles, Grasshopper Sparrows, Field Sparrows and Song Sparrows singing up a storm. The Tree Swallows were already chasing each other around. About halfway across the field a female Wood Duck came out of the trees along the creek on the eastern side of the field. As I slowly made my way to the north edge of the south field listening for a few sparrow and warbler species I hadn't yet heard, but that I expect in that area, a female Wild Turkey came out and almost walked up to me before realizing I wasn't part of the landscape. There were a few males gobbling in the woods on the opposite side of the field so her interest in them must have eclipsed her typical tendency to be cautious.

From there I walked inside the wood edge along the south edge of the north field listening to the many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Robins and Scarlet Tanagers that live in the patch of white pine and hardwoods to the west. This is where I heard the first of what ended up being a string of woodpeckers and cavity nesters. It started as I entered the hardwood stand with a Downy Woodpecker that was making call notes and was in the end being chased away by a Hairy Woodpecker. Continuing into what I always think of as one of the most magical maple/oak/poplar stands as it has a very parklike open understory (photo to right) covered in sedges and trilliums, I could hear a few flickers making some of their odd vocalizations. This was followed by a Red-bellied Woodpecker flying through loudly. As I watched a White-breasted Nuthatch on a



poplar tree, curious if it was nesting there, a second Red-bellied Woodpecker (photo next page) flew in on the tree behind it, landed and proceeded to feed young in a nest cavity that was not the typical cavity as it was very open and almost looked like a natural opening rather than the excavated cavities that are more typical of woodpeckers. Nonetheless, as

it was the first Red-bellied Woodpecker nest I have seen, and one of the few nests of local breeders that I haven't seen, I watched for a while as both of the birds came and went from the opening. The food items were all small, so I imagine the young were recently hatched. To top it all off I could hear a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker calling in the distance and all I could think was that if only a Pileated Woodpecker would make its presence known I would get all expected woodpecker species from a single forest stand. That didn't happen, and I didn't encounter a Pileated all day.



Reluctantly I left that patch of shady, cool forest and made my way through the more open mixed forest to the north and came back to the north field. I walked through the north field watching Eastern Towhees, Brown Thrashers and Song Sparrows all moving nesting material, and did my usual peeking under the snake boards, finding one larger and two smaller Garter Snakes warming up under them. At the northeast end of the field where the big oak is and where the Scots Pine have been removed (thank you to the volunteers who do that!) I heard the Magnolia Warbler that inhabits that part of the more boreal forest-like wetland that exists along the creek. Hoping to hear some of the more boreal species that can inhabit that property I sat on a log and listened. Here I heard a Veery, many Black-throated Green Warblers, Black-and-white Warblers, Northern Waterthrush and Canada Warbler, but not the White-throated Sparrow and Golden-crowned Kinglets that I was also hoping for. As I sat there a Wood Thrush, unhappy about my presence, was flying around me making a racket. I assume that this was a bit of an attractant that led to a Northern Goshawk flying in and landing within 15 feet of me. It made me wonder if this was what was responsible for plucking a Mourning Dove on a large leaning White Pine that I had passed earlier in the morning within about 200 m of this location.

I continued into the swampy woods and heard a Blackburnian Warbler in the larger hemlocks to the northwest. I had a Northern Parula with a Blackburnian Warbler in that same location last year and heard a Parula in a patch of forest nearby the day before, but no luck on this day. By this time, it was getting much warmer, so I decided to make my way back and head home for lunch. I stopped by the pond to see if there was anything new there, but it was getting quieter by this point and I did get to have a close encounter with a small painted turtle (right) which is always nice. This one hadn't seemed to have mastered the art of sinking yet as it kept floating back up every time it made it to the bottom. Working through the small patch of wet forest to the south I emerged into the south field in time to hear and see a Blue-winged Warbler singing from the large dead White Pine tree. At this point I also heard Pine Siskin and a Broad-winged Hawk in the conifer forest to the north before they flew over.



Before leaving I sat at my truck and drank a cup of coffee and hoped to hear a Yellow Warbler, Least Flycatcher or Gray Catbird that can often be at the southeast extent of the property, but no luck. An Eastern Meadowlark from the neighbouring property alighted on the fencepost along the south edge of the field though, and I watched a pair of Eastern Kingbirds building their nest in a white pine. Finally, a Turkey Vulture came soaring over the fields and a Red-tailed Hawk was chased out over the field by Red-winged Blackbirds.

I arrived in the evening with the hopes of picking up a few more species that I had missed



earlier in the day, but the fields and woods were quieter than normal; possibly everything was exhausted after the hot and humid day. I added Indigo Bunting (pictured at left) and Yellow-rumped Warbler, but still missed a few species that I expected including Mourning Warbler (they have been arriving slowly throughout the area), American Redstart, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Blackpoll Warbler. The latter seem to be moving through the

area as I write this report a few days after the count, and the Redstart only showed up at my house this morning. I wandered around the fields at the southwest of the property hoping for a Savannah or Vesper sparrow, but no luck. So, I went to the pond again to see if anything had changed and did hear a Winter Wren to the northeast. Then, I moved from listening to the toads singing in the pond and watching some smaller fish jumping, presumably to catch the numerous mosquitoes emerging from the water, to the upper field. As I entered the field, I was greeted by a Barred Owl making one of their vocalizations and then watched it glide across the field into the woods to the west.

As dusk hit I started to make my way back to south field as I know that there is a mother bear with 2 cubs in that immediate area and didn't want to meet them in the dark up in the woods. Sitting on a rock in the lower field and watching the last light leave I watched the female Wood Duck fly out of the same place along the creek, and I listened to a few American Woodcocks displaying and at least two Eastern Whip-poor-wills. Then it was time to go home and check for ticks.

The full list:

1. Wood Duck
2. Wild Turkey
3. Mourning Dove
4. Eastern Whip-poor-will
5. American Woodcock
6. Ring-billed Gull (fly-over)
7. Turkey Vulture (fly-over)
8. Northern Goshawk
9. Broad-winged Hawk
10. Red-tailed Hawk
11. Barred Owl
12. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
13. Red-bellied Woodpecker
14. Downy Woodpecker

15. Hairy Woodpecker
16. Northern Flicker
17. Eastern Wood-Pewee
18. Great-crested Flycatcher
19. Eastern Kingbird
20. Blue-headed Vireo
21. Red-eyed Vireo
22. Blue Jay
23. American Crow
24. Common Raven
25. Black-capped Chickadee
26. Tree Swallow
27. Barn Swallow
28. Red-breasted Nuthatch
29. White-breasted Nuthatch
30. House Wren
31. Winter Wren
32. Brown Thrasher
33. Eastern Bluebird
34. Veery
35. Hermit Thrush
36. Wood Thrush
37. American Robin
38. Cedar Waxwing
39. Purple Finch
40. Pine Siskin
41. American Goldfinch
42. Grasshopper Sparrow
43. Chipping Sparrow
44. Field Sparrow
45. Song Sparrow
46. Swamp Sparrow
47. Eastern Towhee
48. Eastern Meadowlark
49. Baltimore Oriole
50. Red-winged Blackbird
51. Brown-headed Cowbird
52. Common Grackle
53. Ovenbird
54. Northern Waterthrush
55. Blue-winged Warbler
56. Black-and-White Warbler
57. Nashville Warbler
58. Common Yellowthroat
59. Magnolia Warbler
60. Blackburnian Warbler
61. Chestnut-sided Warbler
62. Black-throated Blue Warbler
63. Pine Warbler
64. Yellow-rumped Warbler
65. Black-throated Green Warbler
66. Canada Warbler
67. Scarlet Tanager
68. Rose-breasted Grosbeak
69. Indigo Bunting