



## NLT Birding Marathon 2024

### McEwen Nature Reserve - Ben Walters - 2024 May 14-15



In the past few years, I was doing my Birding Marathon counts later in the season, trying to use the data for double duty as the McEwen property is also in my breeding bird atlas square. This year, with migration hopping in our area, I was compelled to try to get a larger species list. While I connected with some migrants, it wasn't quite as successful as it would have been if I had been there a day or two earlier when the birds were "dripping off the trees" in our yard.

I started on the evening of May 14<sup>th</sup>, arriving early enough that things were busy around the property. The Tree Swallows, Grasshopper Sparrows and Song Sparrows were all busy chasing each other around and defending their territories. I made my way through the McEwen property's south field, picking up Palm Warbler as well as the usual suspects along the way. The north end of the field is the most consistent Mourning Warbler spot, but unfortunately that later migrating species was not to be found that evening or the next day. There was one about 500 m off the property singing up a storm, but I couldn't count it as I heard it driving out. After giving up on Mourning Warbler I had probably my luckiest finds of the count as I came upon a Solitary Sandpiper and a Great Blue Heron at the pond. When I went back the next morning, the sandpiper and heron were gone, but there were some Common Grackles which can be hit or miss as they don't seem to breed there. I also enjoyed watching lots of Painted Turtles and Eastern Newts (right) surfacing. Walking out for the evening I heard a Barred Owl calling, and 5 different Eastern Whip-poor-wills were singing up a storm which I think was the most I have ever had on this property.



The next morning (May 15<sup>th</sup>), I arrived to a trio of Wild Turkeys already in the neighbour's field with the tom displaying to two hens and not caring at all about my presence. Funnily enough, a crow was waddling along with the hens - an odd scene.

Walking my way into the field at the south, I birded my way north along the east edge. At the north end of the field was a little group of locals and migrants which is where I saw the only Tennessee Warbler of the day as well as several American Redstarts and Nashville Warblers.



This is also where a Warbling Vireo was singing and a late and surprising Ruby-crowned Kinglet was foraging. Making my way north along the creek that is on the eastern edge of the property, there was standard fare with Veery, Ovenbird, Black-throated Green Warblers (right), Blue-headed Vireos and Winter Wrens. This is also where I had all four finches for the day. They were flying around, perching and then moving around again; they added to the northern feel for the day. I had one bird here that bugs me to this day as it sang once as it moved south, and I really could have sworn it was a Louisiana Waterthrush. I tried playing a callback, but with no response.

At the wetland at the back of the property I heard, then saw a Bay-breasted Warbler among the many Nashville, Black-throated Green and Black-and-white Warblers. This spot is usually where I will find a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, but no luck this year. As well, I did not hear any Canada Warblers, but I wasn't really expecting any as I knew that was likely a species I was giving up when I chose to do the birding this early in the month. My hopes for late northern sparrows, like White-throated or Lincoln's, and Swainson's Thrush were also dashed.

Walking back through the property I enjoyed looking at the remaining trilliums and everything greening up but did not encounter any real surprises. The one hill that I usually have a Northern Parula at the top of did not produce. Making my way through the dry oak, poplar, and maple woods, I headed out to the north field to sit for a while. The large number of pussy-toes and violets was nothing like I remember. They are always there, but I don't think I have ever seen them this widespread. The most oddly missing species were Baltimore Oriole (they must have all still been in my yard!) and Brown Thrasher. Last year was the first year I didn't have an oriole here, and this was the first year without a thrasher! Despite searching thoroughly for both of them and there being a lot of suitable habitat, I had no luck. The thrasher is the one that baffles me most as there are shrubs, especially hawthorns throughout the open areas and there is no apparent reason one shouldn't be there at that time.



I ended the day in the early afternoon. It was interesting to do the count almost a week earlier than typical (5 out of 8 previous years were on May 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> and the 3 others were even later). The result was the highest number of species that I have had in my 9 years of doing the birding marathon at this site (78 species) with 3 new species recorded (Solitary Sandpiper (left), Red-shouldered Hawk, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet). Another great year at McEwen.

### **The full list:**

Canada Goose

Wild Turkey

Ruffed Grouse

Rock Pigeon

Mourning Dove

**Eastern Whip-poor-will**<sup>T</sup>

Killdeer

American Woodcock

Solitary Sandpiper

Common Loon

Great Blue Heron

Turkey Vulture

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk

Barred Owl

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Great Crested Flycatcher

Eastern Kingbird

**Eastern Wood-Pewee**<sup>SC</sup>

Least Flycatcher

Blue-headed Vireo

Warbling Vireo

Red-eyed Vireo

Blue Jay

American Crow

Common Raven

Black-capped Chickadee

Tree Swallow

**Barn Swallow**<sup>SC</sup>

Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch

House Wren

Winter Wren

Gray Catbird

European Starling

Eastern Bluebird

Veery

Hermit Thrush

**Wood Thrush**<sup>SC</sup>

American Robin

Purple Finch

Red Crossbill

Pine Siskin

American Goldfinch

**Grasshopper Sparrow**<sup>SC</sup>

Chipping Sparrow

Field Sparrow

Song Sparrow

Eastern Towhee

**Eastern Meadowlark**<sup>T</sup>

Red-winged Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Common Grackle

Ovenbird

Northern Waterthrush

Blue-winged Warbler

Black-and-white Warbler

Tennessee Warbler

Nashville Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

American Redstart

Cape May Warbler

Magnolia Warbler

Bay-breasted Warbler

Blackburnian Warbler

Chestnut-sided Warbler

Black-throated Blue Warbler

Palm Warbler

Pine Warbler

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Black-throated Green Warbler

Scarlet Tanager

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Indigo Bunting

*[Editor's note: Species At Risk are in **bold** and underlined. Superscripts denote the risk category: E = Endangered; T = Threatened; SC = Special Concern]*