

## SEEDATHON 2013

This year's Seedathon was held on Sunday, August 25, 2013. We had an excellent day with 127 species. Kim's story about our day and a list of the birds we found follows:

"I heard the owl scream, and the crickets cry" said Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. Our Seedathon team had a similar experience at our first stop of the day, at 4:33 am, near March Valley Road, although the Great Horned Owls were hooting not screaming. Our day proved to be a truly Shakespearian experience, with plenty of Tragedy, Comedy, and History. Shakespeare in fact was the fourth member of our team. Shakespeare's many references to birds in his plays connected nicely with many of our own experiences; some will be shared with you.

We chose to depart from our usual routine of starting in the Munster area, Bernie's idea, since that area had recently proved to be mediocre, and we had another location for Barred Owls, perhaps the only sure thing we could get in Munster. This strategy would save us nearly an hour of pre-dawn driving. After our first stop, the morning continued well. We had plenty of Veery and Swainson's Thrush calling overhead, and a few more owls before we hit the critical pre-dawn Thomas Dolan Parkway stop. There we got three key birds: Common Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will, and, as Claudio said in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "shall I not find a Woodcock too?" Yes, indeed, Claudio, we did! Two Barred owls were our hoped for bonus at this locale. One potentially ominous note was two Common Ravens, but fortunately Hamlet's words "Come, the croaking Raven doth bellow for revenge" did not come to pass.

Wood Thrush and Hermit Thrush greeted the dawn; however, missing both Eastern Towhee and Field Sparrow here was our first Tragedy of the day, but we could not linger; it was time to move on to Constance Creek. A good assortment of birds awaited us: Brown Creeper and Red-Breasted Nuthatch were two birds we had nowhere else. Here we had the second best moment of the day. A Merlin and a Cooper's hawk were chasing a Northern Harrier, and all the while a Northern Goshawk was watching us and the other raptors! The time was now 7:05, and the tally was 53 species.

A pit stop in Dunrobin gave us the most famous Shakespearean bird, European Starling. As Hotspur said in *Henry IV Part 1*, "Nay, I'll have a starling taught to speak nothing but 'Mortimer,' and give it to him." We owe our starlings in North America to this single reference, since some individuals back in the 1800s decided to introduce all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare.

More time on Thomas Dolan boosted our list, but Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was our only key bird there. Now came decision time. We had already decided to drop Constance Bay, and we had reports that Britannia was good. So we headed back via

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Carp, and quickly checked the wet area that had so many shorebirds weeks ago. As was said in *Othello*, "If I would time expend with such a snipe," which was exactly the situation, as our time expended gave us only Wilson's Snipe.

We arrived at Britannia Ridge at 8:46; our tally was now 66 species. Britannia was very kind to us, perhaps grateful for all the attention given by us to her most famous playwright. The ridge was active and we had a respectable assortment of warblers, some quite good like Bay-Breasted Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. After the variety petered out, it was into the woods. It started slowly, and just as we were getting discouraged, there was a songbird commotion. Bob exclaimed "it has to be a Screech Owl", and sure enough when Bernie followed the sound, we were thrilled when he called out "Screech Owl." To add fuel to the fire of our excitement, among the birds scolding the owl were 2 Carolina Wrens, a Scarlet Tanager and an Ovenbird! This was, without doubt, the highlight of the day. We picked up a few more birds on the way out; our tally was now 87 species.

Now, unfortunately, things started to slow. We headed to Shirley's Bay, stopping at Andrew Haydon Park. There was only a single shorebird, a Killdeer, and very surprisingly our only one of the day. We were fortunate, however, at Shirley's Bay, to have an immediate report from a birder that there was only a single shorebird on the mud flats. We made our decision to drop the dike for the first time ever. It would save us an hour, and we would have to hope for shorebirds at the eastern lagoons.

After a disappointing look from the boat launch (at least we had a Common Loon), we had the comedic highlight of the day, a minor comedy of errors on Rifle Road. Bob saw a perched bird, and Bernie identified it as an Eastern Kingbird. It seemed to fly off as we drove away and Bob then saw another perched bird. Although Bernie initially thought that it was the Kingbird that had moved, we turned around anyway, and it was a different bird, an Olive-sided Flycatcher!

That left us stoked for the drive to the Moodie Drive pit. On the drive there, we reflected that we had seen no swallows yet and it was after 1 pm. Did we need any more hint that summer was winding down? Well spoken were the words of the second lord in *Timon of Athens* "The swallow follows not summer more willing than we your lordship." Luckily, swallows did finally make an appearance here – four species. The pit added a few more birds, but none critical for the day. Leaving the pit, we had 111 species.

On the way to the Airport, the cornfields were an attractant for some major blackbird flocks. 500 Starlings and 1000 Red-Winged blackbirds were impressive sights, and another sign of fall. The first stop on Leitrim Road gave us a bit of a shock. As Hamlet said, "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow," and it seems that we must have had a lot of providence, as most of the sparrows in the area appeared to have fallen. Surprisingly though, there we had 3 individual sparrows of three species!

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The next stop, the bluebird spot near High road, was another Tragedy. 50 minutes were spent, and only a single new species was added for all this effort. Reader, can you spare us, as said by Imogen in *Cymbeline*, “as small a drop of pity as a wren’s eye,” since House Wren was the only new species?

Time and opportunity were running out. Embrun, our next stop, had a pitiful collection of shorebirds, yet they were our only real grouping of the day, and the five new species (Red-necked Phalarope being an excellent one) were desperately needed. St. Albert was a minor Tragedy, especially since a report from the previous day would have given us several new species, had they remained. The Giroux ponds were a complete bust (our only complete bust), and then it was a race to Britannia to see what could be gained in the dying light. Fabian in *Twelfth Night* said “Here comes my noble gull-catcher.” In our case, Bernie came, our noble gull counter. He was faced with a sight to behold below the Deschênes rapids. His heroic effort of counting the nearly 9000 birds that speckled the water deserves the highest praise, and for good measure, he pulled a Lesser Black-Backed Gull out the mess. I had the much easier job of counting Cormorants. The final stop was at Britannia pond, where a Black-Crowned Night-Heron gave us our 127<sup>th</sup> and last species of the day, at 8:12 pm, our team’s best showing in our 4 years together. We also ended the day with 22 birds mentioned in Shakespeare of the 28 possible we might conceivably have found here.

In retrospect, it was an excellent day. The main disappointment was the lack of shorebirds, a situation that was completely out of our control. With the shorebird count from even the previous week, we could have added 6 more, and a bit better luck at the airport would have given us a new Seedathon record. Yet we didn’t lack for luck, and there were no grotesque misses like some years. The weather was excellent, our raptor sightings were excellent, and Britannia gave us one of our best Seedathon moments in years. It was a good performance, but not every performance brings the house down.

Note:

For a complete and fascinating account of the bird imagery in Shakespeare, you can go to: <http://www.acobas.net/teaching/shakespeare/masters/list.html#dico>. Many of the references can only be understood in the context of the literature and culture of the day. Also, despite Shakespeare using the same words, most of the birds, of course, are actually European species.

Canada Goose	303	Eastern Wood-Pewee	2
Wood Duck	93	Least Flycatcher	2
Gadwall	1	Eastern Phoebe	4
American Black Duck	6	Great Crested Flycatcher	7
Mallard	504	Eastern Kingbird	2
Blue-winged Teal	73	Warbling Vireo	3

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Northern Shoveler	14	Red-eyed Vireo	13
Green-winged Teal	34	Blue Jay	19
Ring-necked Duck	7	American Crow	59
Hooded Merganser	3	Common Raven	5
Common Merganser	9	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	1
Ruddy Duck	6	Tree Swallow	125
Wild Turkey	2	Bank Swallow	33
Common Loon	1	Barn Swallow	69
Pied-billed Grebe	6	Cliff Swallow	15
Double-crested Cormorant	297	Black-capped Chickadee	19
American Bittern	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2
Great Blue Heron	9	White-breasted Nuthatch	4
Great Egret	7	Brown Creeper	2
Green Heron	2	House Wren	1
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1	Marsh Wren	2
Turkey Vulture	10	Carolina Wren	2
Osprey	4	Veery	59
Northern Harrier	5	Swainson's Thrush	8
Cooper's Hawk	1	Hermit Thrush	2
Northern Goshawk	1	Wood Thrush	5
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	American Robin	11
Red-tailed Hawk	1	Gray Catbird	8
Virginia Rail	2	European Starling	733
Common Gallinule	9	Cedar Waxwing	93
American Coot	2	Ovenbird	1
Semipalmated Plover	1	Northern Waterthrush	1
Killdeer	1	Black-and-white Warbler	8
Spotted Sandpiper	5	Tennessee Warbler	5
Lesser Yellowlegs	5	Nashville Warbler	6
Semipalmated Sandpiper	2	Common Yellowthroat	5
Least Sandpiper	5	American Redstart	8
Wilson's Snipe	3	Cape May Warbler	2
American Woodcock	1	Northern Parula	1
Red-necked Phalarope	1	Magnolia Warbler	4
Bonaparte's Gull	4	Bay-breasted Warbler	1
Ring-billed Gull	7705	Blackburnian Warbler	1
Herring Gull	1052	Yellow Warbler	3
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	47
Great Black-backed Gull	63	Black-throated Green Warbler	1
Caspian Tern	19	Chipping Sparrow	2
Rock Pigeon	40	Clay-colored Sparrow	1
Mourning Dove	39	Vesper Sparrow	1
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	Savannah Sparrow	34

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Great Horned Owl	6	Grasshopper Sparrow	1
Barred Owl	2	Song Sparrow	30
Common Nighthawk	1	Swamp Sparrow	14
Eastern Whip-poor-will	2	White-throated Sparrow	11
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	3	Scarlet Tanager	1
Belted Kingfisher	5	Northern Cardinal	17
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1
Downy Woodpecker	8	Bobolink	15
Hairy Woodpecker	3	Red-winged Blackbird	1255
Northern Flicker	7	Common Grackle	29
Pileated Woodpecker	4	Baltimore Oriole	6
American Kestrel	3	Purple Finch	3
Merlin	3	House Finch	5
		American Goldfinch	48
		House Sparrow	4