

Report of the 2010 OFNC Seedathon, conducted by Bernie Ladouceur, Bob Cermak and Kim Zbitnew

This year's Seedathon was held on Sunday, September 5, 2010. Kim's story about our day follows:

It was a new gang this year for the Seedathon. After 10 years of faithful service, Bob Bracken and Chris Lewis "retired." Many thanks, Bob and Chris! Kim Zbitnew and Bob Cermak joined Bernie Ladouceur for an event which can only be described as slightly demented. Of course, was it any worse than the week we spent in Arizona in Bob's camper, or even for that matter regular birding? Pickup was at 4:30, and Bernie had already heard some thrushes going overhead. The winds were alarmingly brisk, but we chose optimism over worry. There was a bit of a kerfuffle when Bob showed up with a bag of sunflower seeds, unclear as to the concept of a "seedathon." After clarification, we proceeded to our traditional first stop at Munster, and were thrilled to find that the winds had calmed, and we heard both Long-eared and Barred Owls. Next we raced to the Carp ridge, where the highlight was a trio of Whip-poor-wills. After hearing Eastern Towhees, we continued on down to Constance creek, hoping for rails and bitterns. We got an American Bittern and Virginia Rails, and also the first and only argument – Bernie said that my watch was one minute fast! This was hardly trivial, since we needed to determine the number of species by sunrise. As it turned out I had to eat American Crow as my watch WAS one minute fast, and this confirmed that we had 30 species by sunrise. We thought that was pretty good, and our luck continued at our next stop, the Bill Mason Centre, where we got the second rail of the day (Sora) and a late Willow Flycatcher.

On to Dunrobin, where a Redheaded Woodpecker cooperated by calling within a minute of our arrival; we were also rewarded with a small warbler flock. Next it was back to the Carp Ridge, where a few more birds greeted us, including a good number of Field Sparrows. When we left there at 9:23, the tally was 73 species. Looking good! On the way to Britannia, we got a call: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was at Shirley's Bay. So do we go there or Britannia first? To paraphrase Sarek, Mr. Spock's father, at the time Britannia seemed the logical thing to do. Unfortunately, the logical choice is not always the best one. Britannia was a huge disappointment. Passerines were minimal, the wind had picked up, and depression was setting in. As a consolation our only mergansers of two species (Common and Hooded) were in Britannia.

We cut our losses and didn't linger in those dark woods. We raced to Shirley's Bay, and had encouraging reports of a number of warblers, the ones we thought we had missed by going to Britannia first. Somewhat surprisingly, many were still there even though it was after 11. Three more species of warbler were added and we hoped that many of the shorebirds of the last few days had remained. Our next disappointment was that many of the great birds of the last week were gone; only a few feathers remained of the earlier feast of birds. We finally hit 100 species at 1:10 pm; well off the average pace.

Next, we raced to the eastern sewage lagoons, starting at Casselman. A detour through Larose Forest gave us only a single new species, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and more wind. Still, it was one better than Casselman, which was the only completely wasted stop of the day. Few shorebirds or waterfowl were there, and there were no species we didn't get elsewhere. When we left Casselman at 4:15 we had only

108 species. We were in danger of the dishonour of our lowest count ever. Embrun, mercifully, was better than Casselman, and we had the best birds of the day: two Red-necked Phalaropes.

Next, the long drive to the sparrow fields at the airport, and we got four of the five target birds. We missed only Clay-colored Sparrow, in spite of the increasingly inclement weather, including a few light showers. Now it was 6:54 and we left the airport. We had recovered our spirits and our honour: 116 species. The Moodie drive pit was virtually empty, but luckily two of the few species were new: Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup.

The final race against the dying light was to the site of an earlier debacle, Britannia, where her majesty deigned to give us our last two species. Common Nighthawk flew over, and at 7:48, Black-crowned night heron gave us our 120th and last species of the day.

On what should we blame our struggle to respectability? An excuse or better yet a scapegoat is always needed. The cloudy blustery conditions from 10 am on prevented hawks from showing much, and the poor showing from shorebirds and warblers was another excuse. There was a surprising lack of common species. In fact our miss of the day was House Finch, and we had only two Northern Cardinals and two House Sparrows.

Still, in spite of the seemingly endless disappointments, the final tally was only a bit lower than the long term average. To paraphrase Mark Twain, while we had many terrible experiences today, very few of them actually happened.

CANADA GOOSE	500	EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE	7
WOOD DUCK	40	WILLOW FLYCATCHER	1
AMERICAN WIGEON	7	LEAST FLYCATCHER	1
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	5	EASTERN PHOEBE	5
MALLARD	300	GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER	2
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	50	WARBLING VIREO	2
NORTHERN SHOVELER	4	RED-EYED VIREO	3
NORTHERN PINTAIL	2	BLUE JAY	30
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	150	AMERICAN CROW	150
RING-NECKED DUCK	8	COMMON RAVEN	4
LESSER SCAUP	1	TREE SWALLOW	200
HOODED MERGANSER	2	BANK SWALLOW	2
COMMON MERGANSER	3	CLIFF SWALLOW	1
RUDDY DUCK	25	BARN SWALLOW	6
WILD TURKEY	7	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	30
PIED-BILLED GREBE	6	RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	2
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	100	WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	4
AMERICAN BITTERN	1	BROWN CREEPER	2
GREAT BLUE HERON	20	HOUSE WREN	2
GREAT EGRET	10	MARSH WREN	1
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON	1	EASTERN BLUEBIRD	1
TURKEY VULTURE	40	VEERY	5
OSPREY	2	SWAINSON'S THRUSH	10
BALD EAGLE	1	HERMIT THRUSH	2
NORTHERN HARRIER	4	AMERICAN ROBIN	60
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	3	GRAY CATBIRD	5
RED-TAILED HAWK	6	BROWN THRASHER	1
AMERICAN KESTREL	8	EUROPEAN STARLING	600
MERLIN	4	CEDAR WAXWING	150
VIRGINIA RAIL	2	TENNESSEE WARBLER	2
SORA	1	NASHVILLE WARBLER	3
COMMON MOORHEN	3	NORTHERN PARULA	4
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	15	CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER	3
KILLDEER	80	MAGNOLIA WARBLER	1
SPOTTED SANDPIPER	3	CAPE MAY WARBLER	2
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	5	YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	6
LESSER YELLOWLEGS	25	BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER	4
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER	40	PALM WARBLER	4
LEAST SANDPIPER	30	BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER	2
BAIRD'S SANDPIPER	14	AMERICAN REDSTART	3
PECTORAL SANDPIPER	12	COMMON YELLOWTHROAT	5
WILSON'S SNIPE	1	EASTERN TOWHEE	4
RED-NECKED PHALAROPE	2	CHIPPING SPARROW	1
RING-BILLED GULL	750	FIELD SPARROW	8
HERRING GULL	50	VESPER SPARROW	3
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL	15	SAVANNAH SPARROW	1

ROCK PIGEON	4	GRASSHOPPER SPARROW	1
MOURNING DOVE	50	SONG SPARROW	5
BARRED OWL	1	SWAMP SPARROW	5
LONG-EARD OWL	1	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	25
COMMON NIGHTHAWK	3	SCARLET TANAGER	2
WHIP-POOR-WILL	3	NORTHERN CARDINAL	2
RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD	2	ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK	5
BELTED KINGFISHER	5	BOBOLINK	5
RED-HEADED WOODPECKER	1	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	500
YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	1	EASTERN MEADOWLARK	4
DOWNY WOODPECKER	5	COMMON GRACKLE	3
HAIRY WOODPECKER	6	PURPLE FINCH	3
NORTHERN FLICKER	10	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	12
PILEATED WOODPECKER	2	HOUSE SPARROW	2