

Report of the 2011 OFNC Seedathon, conducted by Bernie Ladouceur, Bob Cermak and Kim Zbitnew

The OFNC Seedathon was held on Sunday, August 28, 2011. Kim's story about our day follows:

"It was a dark and stormy night" wrote Snoopy in his failed attempt to achieve literary fame. A real-life "dark and stormy night", followed by a "dark and stormy day", prevented the team from achieving birding fame. On Friday, the Sunday forecast seemed reasonable, but by Saturday evening we wished that Hurricane Irene had chosen another place for her Sunday drive. Unable to reschedule, we crossed our fingers and met at Bernie's at 4:15 am, where the winds were ominously strong.

New this seedathon was an attempt by Kim to inspire the group with appropriately themed music. The first piece was a rousing march, the "Light Cavalry Overture" by Franz von Suppé, this despite the fact that nobody was even ready for breakfast at this hour.

We made our first pre-dawn stops in the Munster area, where the wind was now only a little bit bad, perhaps frightened by the coming of the light cavalry. Barred Owl and a bonus Great Horned Owl (which have been scarce lately) were encouraging first birds. Carp ridge gave us another critical night bird, Whippoorwill, but even by dawn the winds were picking up, and we could tell it was having a negative effect. Wind would continue to plague us during the day. Dawn found us at Constance creek, where there were no rails but 5 American Bittern put on a good show. Next stop was the Bill Mason Centre, disappointingly quiet, unlike last year, and by our departure there, we were now well behind last year.

On to the Carp Ridge again, which continued to disappoint us, this despite the musical inspiration of "The Cuckoo in the depths of the woods" by Camille St. Saens. There being no point in lingering, it was then on to Britannia. Our first inkling of hope was the rather quick rediscovery of the fast moving warbler flock seen by another group minutes before our arrival. Despite missing some of the birds, our warbler list was now getting up to a respectable level. A quick tour of Britannia woods netted us a few new species, and then it was on to Shirley's Bay. Inspirational music for this segment was "The Aquarium" by St. Saens, the watery theme ideally foreshadowing the abundant water birds we were hoping for. Much to our disappointment was the fact that 2 key birds, seen minutes before our arrival, were nowhere to be seen now, likely frightened by 2 Peregrines Falcons and a Merlin. Still, the falcons put on quite a show, especially the exciting high speed chase of a Purple Martin by a Merlin. The Martin survived the ordeal. A further walk down the dike produced the Great Egrets that had also disappeared minutes before our arrival. In the end we realized that our timing could have been a lot worse, as two other critical shorebirds had disappeared in the last ½ hour, but this time AFTER we had seen them.

Now came decision time. Instead of going to the eastern sewage lagoons first, Bernie thought that we should go instead to the sparrow fields via the Moodie drive pit, to avoid walking through wet grass at the end of the day, given that the sky continued to threaten rain. At the pit we were greeted with a mini sandstorm, a dry hurricane as it were, and the high winds were becoming a constant and annoying feature of our journey. Still, after leaving the pit, we had finally hit 100 species, but it was now 1.20 pm, and we were well off our usual mark.

Time for the sparrow fields at the airport, and on the way there the inspirational “Hens and Cocks” by St. Saens was played, the jumpy piece intending to imitate the flighty nature of the sparrows. Despite the near howling winds, our walk through the sparrow fields quickly produced 3 of our 4 target sparrows, and identification was no more trouble than usual. We also got House Wren and our 17th warbler, Balckburnian. At that point, the momentum had turned. Our spirits had lifted, likely due to the inspirational music finally taking effect.

En route to the Casselman lagoon, a slight detour via Mer Bleue produced our 18th warbler, Palm Warbler. 18 warblers was not bad for such a blustery day!

Inspirational music continued on the way to Casselman, this time “the Swan”, a peaceful piece reminding us that we might be lucky and get a swan in the lagoons. Luckily, this “swan song” was figurative only. As we approached Casselman, the rain began; this was the edge of Hurricane Irene. But our hard work finally paid off. Despite light rain and driving wind, the excellent habitat actually had large numbers of birds and an excellent variety, 12 species and some good ones: Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Baird’s Sandpiper and Sanderling. Some of those were almost certainly driven down by the bad weather. For once, it was worth it to be soaked and miserable.

There was one final stop at Embrun before we ran out of possibilities and enthusiasm. Three more species brought the tally to 116, better than the seedathon’s worst year. We were now cold and exhausted, and nobody had the energy to continue, although an hour of daylight remained. The closing inspirational music before home was “Dies Irae” (Day of wrath) by Mozart. It was more post inspirational, what would have awaited us had we not endured the wind and rain and had a bit of luck.

Overall, the wind certainly kept the count down. There were a number of misses of common birds, including House Finch, and even among the common birds the numbers were low. Likewise, it was a poor day for hawks to fly. Still, the dynamism of the day may have been conducive to the high warbler species count, and the excellent habitat at Casselman gave us a good shorebird tally, resulting in a surprisingly high total of 116 species for the day’s effort. Who knows what we will see next year?

CANADA GOOSE	200	LEAST FLYCATCHER	2
WOOD DUCK	100	EASTERN PHOEBE	10
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	3	GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER	1
MALLARD	40	EASTERN KINGBIRD	6
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	60	WARBLING VIREO	6
NORTHERN SHOVELER	12	RED-EYED VIREO	8
NORTHERN PINTAIL	1	BLUE JAY	25
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	10	AMERICAN CROW	50
RING-NECKED DUCK	25	COMMON RAVEN	5
LESSER SCAUP	1	PURPLE MARTIN	2
HOODED MERGANSER	12	TREE SWALLOW	500
RUDDY DUCK	70	BANK SWALLOW	2
WILD TURKEY	5	CLIFF SWALLOW	4
PIED-BILLED GREBE	12	BARN SWALLOW	3
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	60	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	40
AMERICAN BITTERN	5	RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	2
GREAT BLUE HERON	30	WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	6
GREAT EGRET	3	HOUSE WREN	2
GREEN HERON	1	VEERY	6
TURKEY VULTURE	2	SWAINSON'S THRUSH	2
OSPREY	5	AMERICAN ROBIN	15
BALD EAGLE	2	GRAY CATBIRD	5
NORTHERN HARRIER	3	EUROPEAN STARLING	500
RED-TAILED HAWK	2	CEDAR WAXWING	100
MERLIN	2	TENNESSEE WARBLER	4
PEREGRINE FALCON	2	NASHVILLE WARBLER	3
COMMON MOORHEN	1	YELLOW WARBLER	1
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	3	CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER	1
KILLDEER	2	MAGNOLIA WARBLER	5
SPOTTED SANDPIPER	15	CAPE MAY WARBLER	2
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	2	BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER	2
LESSER YELLOWLEGS	60	YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	12
RUDDY TURNSTONE	1	BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER	1
RED KNOT	5	BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER	1
SANDERLING	7	PALM WARBLER	1
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER	100	BAY-BREASTED WARBLER	6
LEAST SANDPIPER	30	BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER	2
BAIRD'S SANDPIPER	1	AMERICAN REDSTART	12
PECTORAL SANDPIPER	30	OVENBIRD	1
SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER	1	COMMON YELLOWTHROAT	10
RED-NECKED PHALAROPE	3	WILSON'S WARBLER	1
BONAPARTE'S GULL	13	CANADA WARBLER	2
RING-BILLED GULL	2000	CHIPPING SPARROW	3
HERRING GULL	200	FIELD SPARROW	1
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL	30	VESPER SPARROW	2
CAPIAN TERN	1	SAVANNAH SPARROW	2

ROCK PIGEON	250	GRASSHOPPER SPARROW	1
MOURNING DOVE	50	SONG SPARROW	8
GREAT HORNED OWL	1	SWAMP SPARROW	2
BARRED OWL	1	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	6
WHIP-POOR-WILL	4	NORTHERN CARDINAL	6
CHIMNEY SWIFT	1	ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK	6
RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD	3	BOBOLINK	10
BELTED KINGFISHER	5	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	2000
DOWNY WOODPECKER	1	COMMON GRACKLE	2
HAIRY WOODPECKER	6	BALTIMORE ORIOLE	1
NORTHERN FLICKER	6	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	20
EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE	4	HOUSE SPARROW	2