

The Red-eyed Wearios' Baillie Birdathon 2010

Western Quebec and Eastern Ontario

May 27th 2010, 6:00 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Sunny, some cloud, temperatures up to 28° C



Because a couple of *The Red-eyed Wearios* experienced unexpected personal difficulties, the team (Gay McDougall Gruner, Peter Gruner, Betsy McFarlane and Averill Craig) deferred the 2010 birdathon to later in May than planned. This meant that some migrants had already gone on further north and that the leaves were fully out, making remaining birds harder to see. On the other hand, the *Wearios* lucked out in gaining the assistance of a highly skilled “guest birder”, Jeff Harrison. His sharp eyes and excellent ear were invaluable.



This year we had decided to “go local,” targeting eastern Ontario and western Quebec. Sporting *Red-eyed Wearios* caps embroidered with the witty logo designed by Jean DeMarre, we met up at 6 a.m. at the McGill Bird Observatory in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue. Mosquitoes were up early too, massing in battalions, but were mostly repelled by plenty of DEET, while the weather was clear and slightly cooler than during the heat wave of the previous days.

Following the census trail, along the way got our first warblers (American Redstart, Black-throated Blue, Blackpoll, Yellow, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird and a female Mourning Warbler which had just been banded (see picture). House Wren, Indigo Bunting, Goldfinch, Baltimore Oriole, Northern Grackle and a Downy Woodpecker were all seen in the first few minutes, and we saw and heard Song Sparrow and Chipping Sparrow.



From the treetops we heard the repetitive song of Red-eyed Vireos (just as well for a team of our name!) as well as Warbling Vireo, plus the unmistakable squawk of a Great-crested Flycatcher. The musical notes of a Veery were heard from deeper in the woods. Out in the more open area we saw



Northern Cardinal, Tree, Barn and Cliff Swallows flying, as well as Cedar Waxwings and a most cooperative Green Heron, while at the pond we were delighted to glimpse a Sora Rail guarding her extremely well-camouflaged nest in the reeds. Wood Duck and Swamp Sparrows were also present.

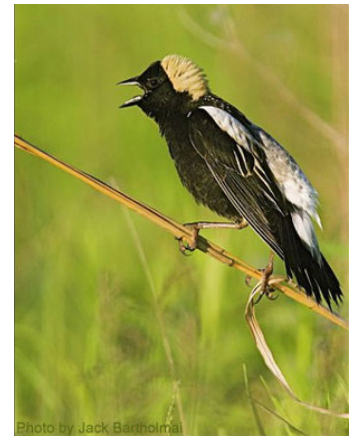
Our next stop was the Pinery at St-Lazare, spotting a Field Sparrow during a halt en route. Pausing only to apply more DEET, we set off along some of the horse-riding trails. We had heard talk of a Goshawk, but didn't see it (fortunately it didn't see us either – these large raptors can dive aggressively if you get too near the nest!). We consoled ourselves with adding more warblers to our list (Magnolia, Yellow Rump, Blackburnian, Cape May) as well as Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Least Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch and a Hermit Thrush.

Now we proceeded over the border into Ontario where the delightful rolling countryside of Glengarry County yielded Savannah Sparrow, Scarlet Tanager, Brown Thrasher, Kingbird, Killdeer, Cowbird and a magnificent view of a Red-tailed Hawk circling just ahead of us. Near Lance Laviolette's farm we added Upland Sandpiper, an Eastern Bluebird, Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker, Chimney Swift, a Cooper's Hawk, Northern Waterthrush, Willow Flycatcher and a Great Blue Heron.



We were now beginning to feel peckish, but on the way to Alexandria for some fortifying French Fries, we found a lovely marsh where Black Terns were wheeling, and a Pied-Billed Grebe was swimming. Black-and-White Warbler was a definite, but a probable Red-bellied Woodpecker was seen so briefly that we deemed it not sufficiently confirmed to count towards our total. With Canada Geese there was no such problem! However, a Pileated Woodpecker apparently about to drill into a telephone pole was even more disappointing – it morphed into a wooden cut-out!

Jeff left us at this point, and after lunch we headed for the extraordinary Alfred Peat Bog; a small piece of boreal forest, it is the most sensitive and beautiful habitat. In the heat of early afternoon, it was quiet and delightfully peaceful, but from the boardwalk we managed to see and hear Clay-coloured Sparrows. Perhaps the day's most memorable experience was enjoyed in approaching the bog. The surrounding hayfields were filled with Bobolinks, male and female, flying, perching, singing – it was “Bobolink Stereo” and we must have seen and heard 200 or more. These lovely birds were so plentiful that it seemed hard to realize they are one of the grassland species suffering severely from earlier haying practices and loss of habitat. Eastern Meadowlarks were present too, but in much smaller numbers. We can only hope the young of both species are able to fledge before the first hay is cut.



Our next experience was very different: that birders' paradise, the Alfred Sewage Lagoons. We had to pick our way through some very dubious looking “mud” which later dried to a strange greenish tinge on our shoes, but neither the Northern Leopard Frog nor your true birder is put off by such minor considerations, and the very handsome observation tower affords great views. Through our ‘scopes we were able to add American Coot, Common Moorhen, and a number of ducks: American Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Mallard, as well as Bank Swallows, Wilson's Snipe, Spotted Sandpiper, several Black-bellied Plovers and, unexpectedly, several tardy Snow Geese!

A handsome Ruddy Duck, with rust red body, bright blue bill and stiffly erect tail performed a spectacular courtship display, rising right up in the water. We enjoyed it very much, but his lady friend seemed merely bored and swam off, unimpressed.



Other lagoons did not yield any different birds, and with reddened eyes and a weary air, we decided to head for Montreal, and a well-deserved dinner overlooking the water at the Willow Inn in Hudson, where we were able to list a couple more species, the last also being the smallest – a Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Though our final count of **90 species** was less than we had achieved at Point Pelee, we were pleased with it nevertheless. Furthermore, we all greatly enjoyed the day, and were glad that we had decided not to push ourselves to go for “one more species” as we have in the past – maybe some of our “per-species” sponsors are too (!), but probably not, since all our sponsors have been so incredibly generous. On behalf of the McGill Bird Observatory and Bird Studies Canada, we thank you all very much.

Our 90 species

Snow Goose	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Yellow Warbler
Canada Goose	Downy Woodpecker	Magnolia Warbler
Wood Duck	Hairy Woodpecker	Cape May Warbler
Gadwall	Northern Flicker	Black-throated Blue Warbler
American Wigeon	Eastern Wood Peewee	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Mallard	Alder Flycatcher	Blackpoll Warbler
Northern Shoveler	Willow Flycatcher	Black-and-white Warbler
Redhead	Least Flycatcher	American Redstart
Ruddy Duck	Great Crested Flycatcher	Ovenbird
Pied-billed Grebe	Eastern Kingbird	Northern Waterthrush
Great Blue Heron	Warbling Vireo	Mourning Warbler
Green Heron	Red-eyed Vireo	Common Yellowthroat
Turkey Vulture	Blue Jay	Scarlet Tanager
Cooper's Hawk	American Crow	Chipping Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Tree Swallow	Clay-coloured Sparrow
Sora	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Field Sparrow
Common Moorhen	Bank Swallow	Savannah Sparrow
American Coot	Cliff Swallow	Song Sparrow
Black-bellied Plover	Barn Swallow	Swamp Sparrow
Killdeer	Black-capped Chickadee	Northern Cardinal
Spotted Sandpiper	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Upland Sandpiper	House Wren	Indigo Bunting
Wilson's Snipe	Eastern Bluebird	Bobolink
Ring-billed Gull	Veery	Red-winged Blackbird
Herring Gull	Hermit Thrush	Eastern Meadowlark
Black Tern	American Robin	Common Grackle
Rock Pigeon	Gray Catbird	Brown-headed Cowbird
Mourning Dove	Brown Thrasher	Baltimore Oriole
Chimney Swift	European Starling	American Goldfinch
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Cedar Waxwing	House Sparrow