

Great Minnesota Birdathon 2007

The second annual Great Minnesota Birdathon (GMB) has officially ended. No need to despair though, we are already thinking about the 2008 GMB (at least in terms of how we can order up southwest winds and warm temperatures!). For those of us that set out to do the St. Louis County Big Day or another county near Lake Superior on May 19th, we were, once again, plagued by howling northeast winds and dropping temperatures. Although most people started out wearing light coats met by calm winds and warm temperatures, by 9:00 a.m. anyone near the lake was thinking about dawning winter coats, caps, and gloves! Despite the weather, nine teams forged ahead with great success. A total of 190 species was found during the St. Louis County Big Day, which was near the 20 year average of 193 species.

Three teams chose to participate in the GMB on an earlier date (something I wish I had considered!). My understanding is that the weather was much more favorable, or at least pleasant, for birding outside of a vehicle for more than 10 minutes! Two of the three teams birded in Duluth on May 18th and were greeted with strong southwest winds and temperatures soon reaching the 80 degree mark. What a difference one day can make near the Big Lake! Regardless, it seemed everyone had a wonderful time no matter what the weather. I believe birders truly are "most hardy folk" (and Hobbits too!).

Three teams scoured the counties of Carlton, Lake and Wright to compete for the winning total in the Single County Big Day category. Two teams tied for the winning total with 113 species in Carlton and Lake Counties. Team "Me, Myself, and I" comprised of Sparky Stensaas, Sparky Stensaas, and Sparky Stensaas spent the day talking to himself (or his imaginary birding buddy) and searching Carlton County, while team "Charlie and the Oompa Loompas" comprised of Charlie (a new and upcoming birding star!), Jim and Sharon Lind spent the day changing diapers, making bottles of formula, and of course, doing a little birding in Lake County.

Highlights found in the Single County Big Day category were: Eared Grebe, Greater White-fronted Goose, Long-tailed Duck, Ruddy Duck, Western Kingbird (Wright County), Summer Tanager (near Silver Creek Cliff north of Two Harbors), Smith's Longspur (Beaver Bay sewage ponds), and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Team "Lars Benson" comprised of Lars Benson (Sparky took the team name Lars wanted before he had a chance) basked under the sunny skies at Park Point and won the Big Sit and Youth division. Spending the day in one place may not be the most productive method to count a lot of species, but when you're on Park Point anything can happen! Lars was able to count an amazing 64 species- congratulations! Highlights in this category included: Red-throated Loon, Horned Grebe, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, and Gray Jay.

Team “Scarlet Teenagers” comprised of Jonas Benson and Alex Ellis (which will soon need to change their team name to “Scarlet Twenty Somethings”) traipsed around Park Point enjoying the same sunny skies as Lars and won the Non-motorized division. It just goes to you don’t need to go far if you’re birding in the right area! The “Scarlet Teenagers were able to find 87 species-again, congratulations! Highlights in this category (if my memory serves me well, which it probably won’t) included: Red-throated Loon, Horned Grebe, Eastern Bluebird, Golden-winged Warbler, and Eastern Towhee.

Seven teams participated in the traditional St. Louis County Big Day, and although the number of teams that participated was slightly below normal, participants were able to compile 190 species in St. Louis County. The total was slightly below the 20 year average of 193 species, but it was well above the record low of 173 species set in 1990. Considering the terrible weather conditions near the lake, a variety of different migrant birds were located (thank goodness for the strong south/southwest winds prior to Saturday).

Team “Cold Duck” (and they weren’t kidding) comprised of Dave and Lars Benson, John and Alex Ellis, and John Heid could do no wrong (except for the minor infraction at the Floodwood sewage ponds!) and came up with an amazing 166 species. Although they did not reach the record total of 177 species for a single team, it appears that they have tallied the second highest number of species in 21 years of Hawk Ridge birdathons! Congratulations to team “Cold Duck”!

Highlights: Western Grebe, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Greater White-fronted Goose, Black Scoter, Ruddy Duck, Willet, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Wilson’s and Red-necked Phalarope, Black-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Fox Sparrow, Harris’s Sparrow, Red Crossbill, and White-winged Crossbill.

For the second time in GMB history, fantastic prizes were awarded to the winning team in each category, ranging from Wild Birds Unlimited and Eagle Optic Gift Certificates, Eagle Optic merchandise, and complete set of field guides (Thanks to all contributors!). We only wished there were enough prizes for each participant for showing your continued support to the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory.

This years Great Minnesota Birdathon is expected to raise over \$2,000, which helps support the many education and research programs that occur at Hawk Ridge. Many thanks to those that contributed to and supported the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory! A special thanks goes out to John Ellis for raising the most pledges in this year’s GMB!

Single County Big Day teams: Sparky Stensaas (Me, Myself, and I/113), Charlie, Jim, and Sharon Lind (Charlie and the Oompa Loompas/113) and Claudia Egelhoff and Jim Ryan (No team name/110).

Big Sit and Youth teams: Lars Benson (Lars Benson/64).

Non-motorized teams: Jonas Benson and Alex Ellis (Scarlet Teenagers/87).

St. Louis County Big Day teams: Dave and Lars Benson, John and Alex Ellis, and John Heid (Cold Duck/166), Don Kienholz, Esther Gesick and Paul Egeland (The Spectacled Flower Piercers/140), Dick Sandve, Bill Marengo, Bonnie Mulligan and Charlie Greenman (Peruvian Thick-Knees/135), David Alexander, Ben, Joshua, and Peter Yokel (Meals on Wheels/133): Terry Wiens, Dave Grosshuesch, and Terry Hams (Anti-Pedalpushers/121), Audrey and Joel Evers and Nancy Jackson (Hoyt Lakes Loon Lookers/100), Barbara Akre, Cindy and Chris Edwardson, and Mary Gabrys (Wandering Ponderers/95), and Molly Evans and Sarah Grosshuesch (Girls Just Want To Have Fun/ ?).

The Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory Board members and staff cannot thank the participants enough for their continued support and enthusiasm-Thank you!

Note to all Team Leaders and Participants: Please pass this information along to all team members not present at the brunch in order to collect pledges, as I do not have email addresses for everyone who participated. Also, for the St. Louis County Big Day, pledges should be based on the composite list of 190 species. The Single County Big Day pledges should be based on the composite list generated for the county you participated in (e.g. composite list in Wright County was 110 species). If you need a hard copy of this year's composite list, please let me know.

Send pledges to: Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 3006, Duluth, MN 55803. Please make your check payable to the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, and please note in the Memo section "Birdathon".

Note: If you raised \$30.00 or more for the Great Minnesota Birdathon and did not get a T-shirt, please let me know what size you would like and your mailing address. Thanks!

Thanks again for supporting the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory!

Sincerely,

David A. Grosshuesch