



2017 Hawk Ridge Birdathon Summary **31st Annual Celebration!**

Cool temps in the 40's and strong 15-30mph east winds didn't stop teams from making the best of the 31st annual Hawk Ridge Birdathon. In fact, the adverse weather likely helped add exciting new species to our overall list! Seven teams participated in several different categories in this friendly competition throughout the 24-hour period on Saturday May 20th. We truly thank those that participated and have already pledged. All proceeds go support the bird research and education programs of Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory!



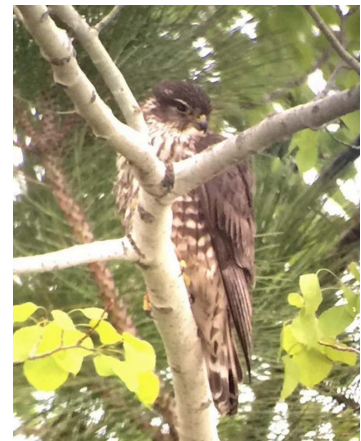
Birding the Mesabi Trail – photo courtesy Steve Wilson



*Team Whip-poor-wheels – photo courtesy Steve Wilson
(L to R: Steve Wilson, Mary Shedd, Pam Wettering,
Sierra Wettering, Steve Schon, & Norma Malinowski)*

Team Whip-poor-wheels (Steve Wilson, Mary Shedd, Sierra & Pam Wettering, Norma Malinowski, Steve Schon, & Suzanne Winckler) participated again in the *Township* category, as well as completing it non-motorized (walked 6.75 miles and biked 13.5 miles)! Team captain, Steve Wilson, had this highlight summary to share: “There are ideal birding days, and then there was Saturday’s Hawk Ridge Birdathon, which saw Team Whip-poor-wheels shivering in 36° pre-dawn temps, hanging on through mid-day wind gusts of +25mph, and enduring a 40°, driving rain/sleet combo as they pedaled for home. Despite this weather

handicap, the Whips were able to tally 86 species, second only in their five birdathon efforts to last year’s total of 91. This, despite missing several species for the first time, like Sora, American Woodcock, Wilson’s Snipe, Barred Owl, Hermit Thrush, Blue-headed Vireo and Savannah Sparrow. Luckily, newcomers to the Whips’ birdathon list more than compensated for the unexpected misses, and included American Black Duck, Northern Harrier, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Winter Wren, Northern rough-winged Swallow, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, and a most unexpected Yellow-headed Blackbird. The highlight of the day was a female merlin, flushed from close range off a freshly-killed European starling. Reluctant to leave its prize, she afforded us luxurious views as she perched in a nearby tree, before flying back down to near the starling, as if to emphasize her claim to the deceased, which we were more than happy to honor by departing the scene.”



Cooperative Merlin – photo by Pam Wettering

Team Canoeber(d) (Andrew Webster & Matti Erpestad) competed in the *Non-motorized* category. They ended up with 61 species with Matti calculating an average of one new bird species every five minutes of their 5-1/2 hour Big Day Birdathon! Highlights for their team included canoeing the swift water of the upper part the St Louis River (not far beneath the hydro dam), a Red-headed Woodpecker (one of the 7 woodpecker species they counted), watching a Baltimore Oriole at a feeder, the fact that it was too cold (and early) for mosquitos, and after searching for pelicans all day - finally seeing a lone individual near the Oliver Bridge - their last species counted!



Matti at the helm – photo by Andrew Webster



Gail Johnejack

Team Backyard Birder (Gail Johnejack) also competed in the *Non-motorized* category - also close to the *Big Sit* category, but within her own backyard for a total of 22 species. Wrens, sparrows, & mallards enjoyed her pond, as well as a visiting muskrat. She then witnessed one of her own hawks of Hermantown celebrating prom that night.

Four teams competed in the traditional *St. Louis County "Big Day"* category. Team Wingin' It! (Margie Menzies, Janelle Long, & Molly Thompson) were "pointed" in the right direction to a great diversity of warblers at both Park Point & Indian Point. Warblers made up about 1/3 of their total of 65, as they counted 20 different warbler species, including their HUGE highlight of a 1st county & Birdathon record Prairie Warbler at Indian Point. All three confirmed markings and Molly confidently recognized, as having been familiar with the species from her time spent living and birding out East.



Team Wingin' It! (Margie Menzies, Janelle Long, & Molly Thompson)



Team Foggy Bogggers (Chris & Cindy Edwardson; not pictured Barb Akre)

Team Foggy Bogggers (Barb Akre, Cindy & Chris Edwardson) tallied 102 species for the third place win! They also earn the win for one of the longest, consecutive participating Hawk Ridge Birdathon teams! Highlights included Great Gray Owl in the Bog, watching dancing Sandhill Cranes, and a beautiful Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

For the second year in a row, the top two teams raced to the finish line with a difference of only 8 species! Team Taking the Pish (John Richardson, Clinton Nienhaus, & Jessica Dexter) took 2nd place with 148 species. They had quite a few highlights within their 20 hour Big Day, including birding Cook, MN and finding a 1st record American Three-toed Woodpecker! Long-eared Owl, Long-tailed Duck, Black Tern, and Yellow-throated Vireo were just a few great species recorded on the Pish list.



Team Taking the Pish (L to R: Jessica Dexter, John Richardson, Clinton Nienhaus, Kristina Dexter, & Tod Eggenberger)



Winning Team – Grouching Twitchers!
(Dave Benson & John Ellis; not pictured Lars Benson & Dave Steininger)

The traveling owl trophy returned back to the all-star Team Grouching Twitchers (Dave Benson, Lars Benson, John Ellis, & Dave Steininger) who took the win with a grand total of a whopping 156 species! Highlights for their team included seeing large flocks (25+) of Eastern Kingbirds and Bobolinks at the Meadowlands Sewage Ponds; three species of loons; re-finding first-time Eurasian Collared-Dove and Lesser Black-backed Gulls; plus, of course, the best part of every year--experiencing the panorama of bird migration in Duluth! Congrats Team Grouching Twitchers on your Big Day win in this 31st year of friendly competition!

In all, a **grand total of 189 species were counted** on May 20, 2017. 189 species equals the 31-year average, which was great given the inclement weather. The St. Louis County Birdathon 31-year grand total is 270 species. 218 species was the highest total count in 1996 and 164 was the lowest count in 2011. The 1996 winning team (Terry Brashear, Mike Hendrickson, Mark Ochs, & Kim Risen) still holds the Big Day record with a whopping 177 species!

Highlights of birds seen in less than half of the Birdathons: Lesser Black-backed Gull, Eurasian Collared Dove, American Three-toed Woodpecker, & Prairie Warbler (1st year seen), Pacific Loon (2nd year seen), Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (3rd year seen), Stilt Sandpiper (4th year seen), White-winged Crossbill (6th year seen), American Golden Plover (7th year seen), Long-tailed Duck (8th year seen), Long-eared Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, & Yellow-throated Vireo (12th year seen), Black-throated Blue Warbler, Red-headed Woodpecker & Northern Goshawk (13th year seen), Ruddy Duck (14th year seen), Red-throated Loon, American White Pelican, & Black-backed woodpecker (15th year seen). A total of 26 species of warblers were seen!

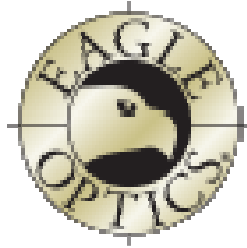
A big THANKS goes out to the prize donors. Thank you to Eagle Optics, Lake Superior Garden Center, Stone Ridge Press & Kollath-Stensaas Publishing for the wonderful prize donations. Don't forget the winning prize (Eagle Optics Denali 10x42 Binoculars) **for the *Most \$\$ Raised* category** is still to be awarded to the person that raised the most money, so get your pledges in! Pledges should be received **no later than June 30th, 2017.**



Hawk Ridge Legends & Birdathon Supporters (Jan & John Green)

A special thank you to the following: **Margie Menzies & Clinton Nienhaus** for help with brunch set up, **Dave Benson** as the compilation emcee, & **Molly Thompson** for web maintenance. Thanks to all who attended and brought delicious dishes to share at the potluck. Thank you and congratulations again to all that participated and helped make this event possible!

P.S. A friendly reminder to please get your registration fee and/or pledges in! This can be done **online at <http://www.hawkridge.org/events/birdathon/>**. Donors can pledge online to specific teams this year (just scroll down and donate to your team)! Alternatively, fee/pledges can be **mailed to: Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 3006, Duluth, MN 55803**. Checks should be made payable to the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, with a note on who fee/pledge should be applied to. Pledges should be received **no later than June 30th, 2017.**



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