



2018 Hawk Ridge Birdathon Summary **32nd Annual Celebration!**

In hopes that we'd be able to pick the nicest, birdiest day to max our lists, we expanded the Birdathon from the traditional weather gamble of a take-what-you-can-get 1 day to a lovely pick the best day out of 10 days timespan. If you want to find out if this new strategy worked, you'll have to read on! Eight teams participated in several different categories in this friendly competition throughout the 10-day period beginning on Saturday May 19th and ending Memorial Day May 28th. 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!



American White Pelican – photo courtesy Bryan French



*Team Whip-poor-wheels –
photo courtesy Steve Wilson*

Team Whip-poor-wheels (Steve Wilson, Mary Shedd, Norma Malinowski, Steve Schon) participated again in the *Township* category, as well as completing it non-motorized (walked 9 miles and biked 15 miles)! Team captain, Steve Wilson, had this highlight summary to share: “Be Careful What You Ask For. This tired old saw sprung back to life with this year’s Whips’ birdathon effort. Many’s the time in past birdathons when we imagined the glories (high species counts) and comforts (no wind, sleet or driving rain) if we could only choose our date, instead of being assigned the day we had to count and inevitably finding ourselves at the mercy of migration timing and weather. This year the power- that-be heard our plea and gave us a ten-day window during which we could select the day ourselves. Finally. We carefully tracked migration trends and monitored weather forecasts, and decided the 23rd was the day to yield maximum results without undue suffering. At this point, another well-worn phrase, The Best Laid Plans, came into play. We did, indeed, set a record, but not the hoped-for smashing of our previous high of 91 species. Rather, after 9-walking and 15-biking miles, the only record achieved was for most biting insects counted when Mary and I walked through Lake Vermilion State Park at dusk and experienced insanity-inducing levels of the little buggers. Other than that it was a glorious day for birding, and we did tally 88 species, our second-best effort in six birdathons by the Whips. Included were numbers of singing Wilson’s Warblers and a couple of new species for the count: the always-difficult-to-find Black-backed Woodpecker, and a spectacular American Avocet, a species seldom found in this area. Still, one can’t help but think upon what could have been, given the number of easy misses like any of the mergansers, several sandpipers, the usually-reliable state park Barred Owl, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (!), to name just a few. If only we hadn’t been given so darn many days to choose from...”



*Team Whip-poor-wheels –
photo courtesy Steve Wilson*

Team Nut Brown Thrashers (Tim Bates & Andrew Webster) competed in the *Non-motorized* category and set a new record for their team and overall in the non-motorized category with 111 species!! They birded Hartley, Park Point (out to the Pine Knot) then back (lunch at Canal Park brewing and had a nut brown ale, hence the origin of their name), over to WLSSD and 40th. 4:30am start to 8pm finish. All biking with some walking (they noted very sore bottoms and noted they considered "SORAs\$*\$" as a name). They had a fantastic day, despite a 2 hour chunk with no birds and no luck with shorebirds others were seeing. Hartley & 40th were both goldmines for their team.

Team Plethora of Cloacas (Bryan French, Mikayla Haynes, & Steve Gebhard) also competed in the *Non-motorized* category tallying a respectable 66 species on their journey! They canoed the St. Louis River, starting at Chamber's Grove at 7:45a, ending at Indian Point Campground at 6:30p. Here are a few pictures courtesy of Bryan French from their Big Day:



The Limno Lab Ladies (Janelle Long, Molly Thompson, & Noel Larson) participated in the *Non-motorized* category, as they enjoyed a birding lunch walk along the Lester River tallying 25 species. It was a beautiful spring day, as songs of warblers filled the air. Highlights included great views of many warblers, watching a nesting Red-breasted Nuthatch, and a pair of mergansers.

The Cook County Sugarloaf Team (Margie Menzies, Joe Lutz, & Bruce Munson) tallied 76 species! They were also the only team to participate in a *Big Day* category for Cook County. They had 2 very birdiful spots at Taconite Harbor & Dyer Lake with many species of warblers, full breeding plumage Lapland Longspur, grebes, Trumpeter Swan, Peregrine Falcon, & Horned Lark, amongst other great sightings.

Frank Nicoletti did a *Big Sit* at the West Skyline Spring Count site from 9am-4pm on May 22nd and tallied 62 species! Frank said it was a great flight that lasted only a few hours, but fun seeing kettles of Bald Eagles like one would see in March/April. Broad-winged Hawks put a nice show as well. Frank also counted the first Golden Eagle seen during a Birdathon. Temps reached 73 degrees, mostly SSW winds 5-12, partly cloudy. Flight shut off by 1:00 or so.

Ben's Birding Buddies (David Alexander & Annmarie Geniusz) competed in the traditional *Big Day* category on Sat. May 19th. They tied the Nut Brown Thrashers for 2nd place overall with 111 species. Their highlight was hearing the American Bittern calling in the early a.m. in Normana township, then seeing one on the side of the road in the big just at dusk, as it was standing with its head up and thinking it was invisible!

And now the drum roll please for the first place team.....(yes, keep scrolling to page 3)



Winning Team – Grouching Twitchers!

While this photo is from the 2017 Birdathon, it still holds true for 2018 with Team Grouching Twitchers (Dave Benson, John Ellis) who took the win with a grand total of 150 species! Highlights for their team included Evening Grosbeaks in Lakewood Township, Grasshopper Sparrow in the bog, a Black Tern over Lake Superior, and the usual panorama of Northeastern Minnesota bird life! They also added the Rusty Blackbird & Eurasian Tree Sparrow to the list! Congrats Team Grouching Twitchers on your Big Day win in this 32nd year of friendly competition!

In all, a **grand total of 188 species were counted**. 188 species is close to the 32-year average of 189. The St. Louis County Birdathon 32-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! The second highest total was 167 species counted 5 years ago on May 18, 2013 by Dave Benson, Lars Benson, and John Ellis.

Dave Benson takes the lead in being part of a winning Big Day team for 11 Birdathons, including this year! Tony Hertzell and Lars Benson tie for second with 8 Birdathon team wins.

2018 highlights of birds seen in less than half of the Birdathons: Golden Eagle, Rusty Blackbird, & Eurasian Tree Sparrow (1st year seen), Eared Grebe & Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (3rd year seen), American Avocet, Cackling Goose, Lark Sparrow (4th year seen), Western Grebe (5th year seen), Grasshopper Sparrow (6th year seen), Long-tailed Duck, White-winged Scoter (9th year seen), Horned Lark & Lapland Longspur (10th year seen), Rough-legged Hawk (11th year seen), Surf Scoter & Red-bellied Woodpecker (13th year seen), Marbled Godwit & Canvasback (14th year seen), A total of 24 species of warblers were seen!

A big THANKS goes out to Vortex Optics for the wonderful prize donation. **Congratulations to Steve Wilson** for winning the ***Most \$\$ Raised*** category and taking the prize of new Vortex binoculars!

Thank you to all the dedicated participants and long-time supporters! Over \$25,000 in funds have been raised in the last 10 years from the Birdathon for the fall research and education programs at Hawk Ridge! We truly appreciate your donations, as this event is in an important means of support for programs at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve, including the fall bird migration count, bird banding, and both school and public environmental education programs.

THANK YOU and hope to see you at the Ridge this fall!