



# Audubon VERMONT

## Birdathon Adventure 2018

*By Gwendolyn Causer, Teacher/Naturalist*

This year's Birdathon Story is going to be more about people and partnerships than just the birds. It's been such a busy spring - thanks for waiting to hear about the adventures!

Since a scheduling situation kept me from attending the Staff Birdathon this year I decided to do mini-Birdathons with my students in addition to joining a Board Birdathon team. It was a whirlwind week of birding with great opportunities to connect with folks in many different ways.

My first mini-Birdathon was on May 10<sup>th</sup> with my [Homeschool](#) students. May's topic was *Birds and Blossoms*, a perfect opportunity to figure out which birds were making their home at the Audubon Center and to highlight the importance of native plants for their survival. We started the day making Birdathon journals to keep track of the birds we would see or hear. It quickly became clear to me that flexibility was going to be essential for the Birdathon.

Each student was at a very different place with their strongest learning style: a couple were into the list-making and recording, others were more engaged by the bird behavior, and a few were most enthusiastic about sharing their own personal stories and connections to the birds they knew and loved. I loved finding the right balance to keep everyone learning from each other. We ended up with a list of 14 bird species (see end of story for full list) and plenty of stories about goofy nesting locations, surprise bird sightings, and plans for planting native plants.



Photos: Gwendolyn Causer, Audubon Vermont

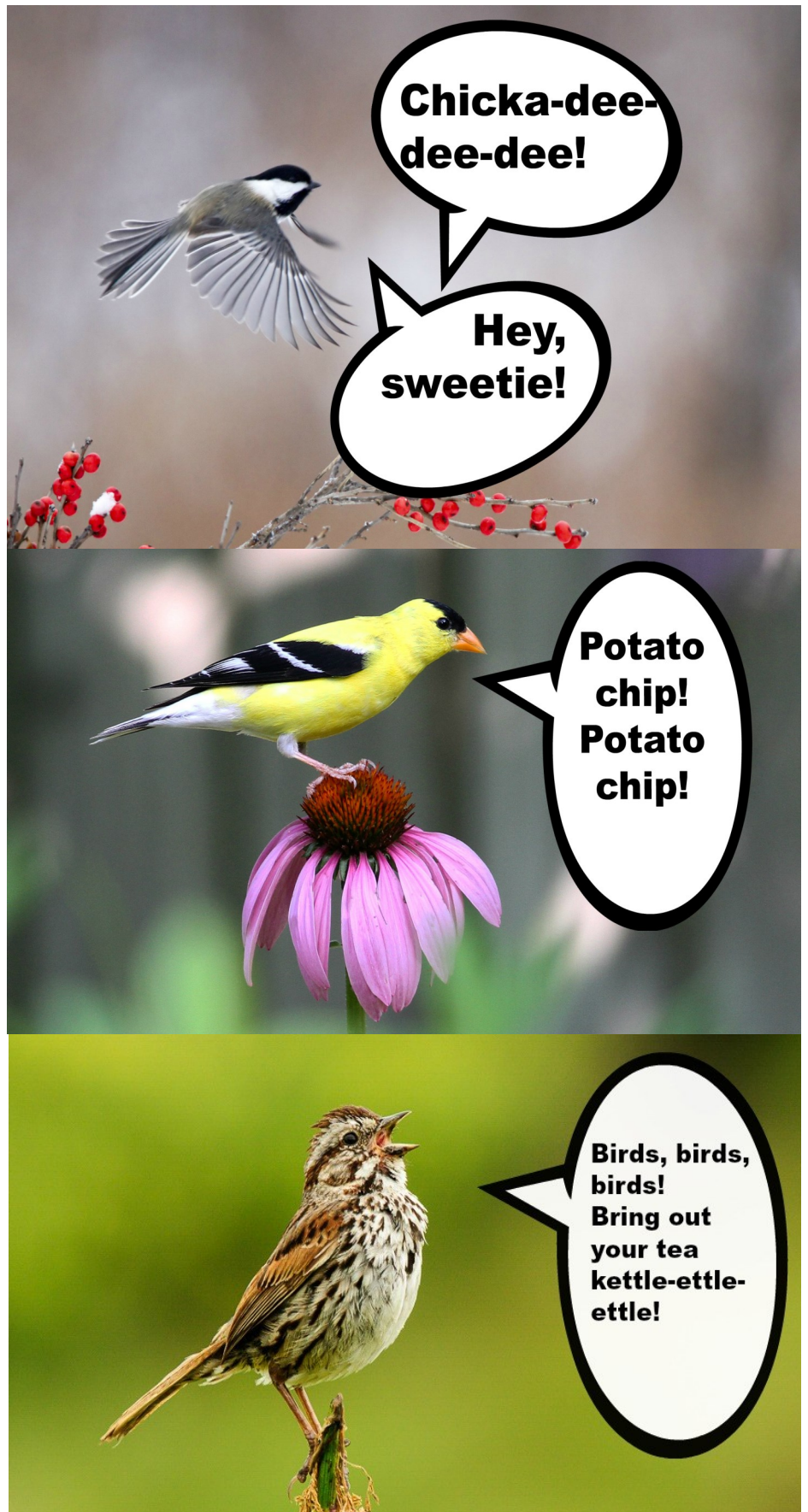


My second mini-Birdathon took place on the same day as the official Staff Birdathon: Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>.

I spent the day in North Hero at the staff retreat for Northeastern Family Institute, VT, a private, nonprofit agency that serves Vermont families whose children struggle with severe emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges. I focused on connecting with nature no matter where you are, being present with the sounds and sights around without needing to name everything.

I suggested humor as a wonderful way to connect. Birdsong mnemonics served as a fine example. Take the Black-capped Chickadee - it's easy to hear that they sing their own name. Same for the Blue Jay, Eastern Phoebe, and Whip-poor-will. Listening to the American Goldfinch, it was more of a stretch to hear the cadence of the words "potato chip!" in its bouncy, complicated song. What brought out the laughter in the group was when I heard a Song Sparrow singing near the shore and translated its birdsong into "Birds, birds, birds! Bring out your tea kettle-ettle-ettle!" Really, that's what it said? Not being afraid to be silly makes all the difference.

We ended up keeping a tally of the birds we saw and heard during the training and ended up with a list of 24 species (see list below).



**Photos**

(1) Black-capped Chickadee. Photo: Gail DuBois

(2) American Goldfinch. Photo: Will Stuart

(3) Song Sparrow. Photo: Pat Ulrich





**Photos (clockwise from top/left):**

- (1) Mark LaBarr, Rae Bronenkant, Kim Guertin
- (2) Emily Kaplita, Debbie Archer, Steve Hagenbuch
- (3) Rae Bronenkant, Mark LaBarr, Margaret Fowle, Steve Hagenbuch, Kim Guertin, Debbie Archer, Emily Kaplita
- (4) Rae Bronenkant, Emily Kaplita, Margaret Fowle

Meanwhile, at the Green Mountain Audubon Center, the Staff Birdathon was a wonderful success, with a total of 87 species tallied over the 24-hour counting period. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird started the count and a Wood Duck wrapped up the day. For the full list of birds [click here](#). Once again this year, the staff Birdathon was a fossil-fuel-free event, starting with hiking in Huntington, then transitioning to bikes on a route through Huntington, past Gillette Pond, along the Winooski River, and into Richmond to count the “city birds.” We were lucky to have youth-birder Isaac Wood-Lewis join us again this year, and he was lucky enough to find 4 “life birds” during this year’s Birdathon.





My favorite mini-Birdathon happened on Friday, May 18<sup>th</sup> with students from Winooski Middle School's Newcomer Academy. This was my seventh of eight outreach visits this spring and the highlight of every week for me. Students focused on learning which birds are in their neighborhood, how birds are able to survive (Plants for Birds!), and what they can do to help in their community.

The Birdathon was so engaging and exciting for the students. They were able to recognize most birds by their songs after many weeks of singing their silly mnemonics together. As highly-motivated English language learners, everyone worked to help each other sound out the spelling for each and every bird, not an easy task for birds like the Mourning Dove or White-breasted Nuthatch. (See full list of birds below.) We came up with a tally of 12 birds and wondered where the Ring-billed Gulls and Black-capped Chickadees were hiding that day.



**Photos:** Jean Plasse, Winooski School District



My most seriously-birdy Birdathon happened on Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup> with a team of Audubon Vermont board members. We were joined by an expert-level birding friend, Bubba Scales, who was visiting from Florida. His birding skills took our count to a whole other level. We ended up with a total of 103 species, some of which were “life birds” for me. I don’t keep an official life bird tally, but I so usually recognize when I’m seeing a new bird for the first time. Another factor that contributed to our high total was that we drove to different locations to visit different bird habitats. We started our group birding at the Hinesburg Town Forest on a cool, drizzly morning. Most of the birds were identified by ear. The most interesting find of the morning was a group of Red Crossbills feeding on fir cones high in the treetops. We then visited the Hinesburg water treatment ponds to find an impressive array of shorebirds: Killdeer, Dunlin\*, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, and Greater Yellowlegs\*. Next stop was Lake Iroquois for larger waterfowl. Our final group birding site was Staige Hill Farm, our board chair Curt Alpeter’s home. His property is one of the sites where we placed geolocators on Golden-winged Warblers ([click here](#) for an update on the project, as well as a video and slideshow). The golden-wings didn’t disappoint; they flitted around the shrubby habitat, singing their “bee buzz buzz” song. Here’s our official Birdathon Board team checklist on eBird: <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S45888562>

Special thanks to board member Natalie Harder for her stunning photography:

\* life bird for Gwen



**Photos (clockwise from top/left):**

- (1) Eric Sorkin, Curt Alpeter, Gwendolyn Causer, Bubba Scales, Charlie Harder
- (2) Charlie Harder, Curt Alpeter, Gwendolyn Causer
- (3) Curt Alpeter
- (4) Mallard Duck family at Lake Iroquois



My last mini-Birdathon was planned for Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup> at Oakledge Park in Burlington with students from the King Street Center. It turned out to be a gorgeous, blue-sky day, but Birdathon-ing just wasn't the right activity for afterschool kid energy, so we shifted gears. We took a look at some real bird nests together, then some kids chose to build their own bird nests while others played a high-energy, complicated game of tag. We wrapped up the afternoon with a visit to the newly-planted 1,000 native trees and shrubs - a wonderful community volunteer effort to restore wetlands with Plants for Birds. [Click here](#) for a beautiful video of the day by Ira Shadis, a lovely slideshow of photos by Lisa Lillibridge, and a thank-you to the many groups involved in the effort. Dandelions were clearly the favorite plant of the day for the King Street kids!



Photos: Gwendolyn Causer, Audubon Vermont

**Thank you** for all of the kind notes, words of encouragement, and generous donations we've received!

People ask me if it's too late to donate to Birdathon and our answer is: "It's never too late to donate to Birdathon!" In fact, there's a Staff versus Board Birdathon Fundraising Challenge happening and we're currently tied!

- Gwen Causer

[Donate to Audubon Vermont](#)

P.S. For friends and family wondering about Ella and Birdathon this year, she was in the middle of finals week at Oberlin College, so she wasn't able to join in Birdathon for the first time in over 10 years. She had a great first year and is majoring in Biology.

Learn more about the birds with [Audubon's Bird Guide](#) or download the free [Audubon Bird Guide App](#).

## **Audubon Homeschoolers' Birdathon Count**

### **Huntington, VT**

May 10, 2018

- 1) Common Yellowthroat
- 2) Red-winged Blackbird
- 3) Tree Swallow
- 4) Yellow Warbler
- 5) Eastern Phoebe
- 6) Blue Jay
- 7) Black-capped Chickadee
- 8) American Robin
- 9) Ovenbird
- 10) Black-throated Blue Warbler
- 11) Canada Goose
- 12) Brown Creeper
- 13) Eastern Kingfisher
- 14) American Crow

## **NFI Training mini-Birdathon at Camp Abenaki**

May 16, 2018

- 1) Baltimore Oriole
- 2) Osprey
- 3) Pileated Woodpecker
- 4) Red-bellied Woodpecker
- 5) Black-capped Chickadee
- 6) Northern Cardinal
- 7) Song Sparrow
- 8) Black-and-white Warbler
- 9) Downy Woodpecker
- 10) Common Grackle
- 11) American Crow
- 12) Red-winged Blackbird
- 13) Blue Jay
- 14) Brown Creeper
- 15) Canada Goose
- 16) Eastern Phoebe
- 17) American Robin
- 18) Double-crested Cormorant
- 19) Turkey Vulture
- 20) Tufted Titmouse
- 21) Ovenbird
- 22) Great-crested Flycatcher
- 23) Eastern Starling
- 24) Tree Swallow

## **Winooski Newcomer Academy Count**

### **Winooski, VT**

May 18, 2018

- 1) American Robin
- 2) Common Grackle
- 3) American Goldfinch
- 4) Tree Swallow
- 5) Grey Catbird
- 6) Song Sparrow
- 7) European Starling
- 8) Red-winged Blackbird
- 9) Canada Goose
- 10) Mourning Dove
- 11) White-breasted Nuthatch
- 12) American Crow

## **King Street Kids Count**

### **Oakledge Park, Burlington, VT**

May 24, 2018

No birds counted, but we saw 1,000 new native trees and shrubs:

#### **Native Tree Species planted:**

- Serviceberry
- Black Willow
- Red Maple
- Grey Birch

#### **Native Shrub Species planted:**

- Silky Dogwood
- Red Osier Dogwood
- Shrub Willow
- Elderberry
- Winterberry
- Highbush Cranberry
- Arrowwood Viburnum