

# Birdathon Adventure 2013 – Audubon Vermont

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by Gwendolyn Causer



A cool, overcast Birdathon day (perfect birding weather) yielded an official Audubon count of 82 species this year, featuring some spectacular sightings of some of our most colorful spring migrants: Indigo Bunting, Blackburnian Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager. My official “Causer-count” ran slightly higher, to 86 species, since I also included the House Wren that woke me up at 4:30 a.m., my next-door-neighbor’s chickens that clucked to me as I sleepily strapped my bike

to the car, the pair of Red-tailed Hawks that I spotted along the highway on my drive to Audubon, and some domestic ducks in a yard that we biked past in Huntington. The roster of birders also ran high this year. All 12 Audubon staff joined in, as well as one board member. Peter Ross, Audubon Vermont’s brand-new Executive Director spent his very first day on the job at Birdathon – a true testament to his adventuresome spirit (pictured in blue at right).



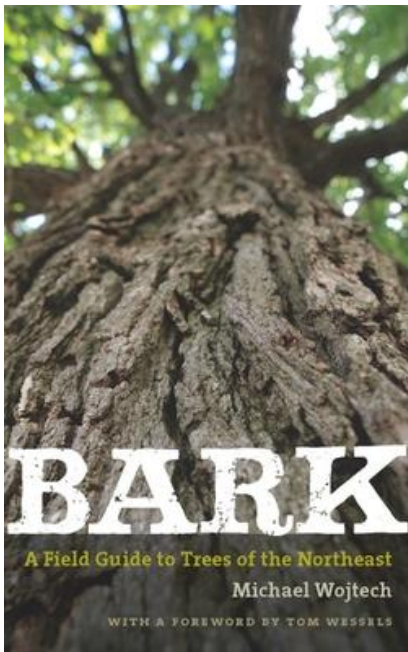
The Indigo Bunting’s insistent “Fire, fire! Where, where? Here, here! There, there!” song marked the 6 a.m. Birdathon start at the office porch. We tallied seven other species as we gathered ourselves and our gear for our hike. Adjacent to the Audubon office we spotted birds that thrive and nest in old fields and shrublands. Land in Vermont “wants” to revert back to forest, which can translate to fewer nesting options for these birds. Mark LaBarr noted that after nesting season this summer the old field is scheduled to be cut to restore this habitat. The Common Yellowthroats and Chestnut-sided Warblers will be happy.



As we climbed higher, we teased apart the songs of the high-pitched birds (purely a coincidence): Blackburnian Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Winter Wren, and Brown Creeper. At Lookout Rock the complex, melodious song of a thrush had us all picking sides of Wood Thrush versus Hermit Thrush, until we realized that both were singing. Taking the recently-restored Museum Trail up to the ridgeline, we searched the oak treetops for the scratchy-sounding Scarlet Tanager (described as sounding like a Robin with a sore throat) and the sweetly-singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak (a Robin with voice lessons). Four of us lagged behind to try to spy the singers and puzzle over late-spring tree identification (butternut versus bitternut). I’m ready for Audubon’s [Bark Workshop](#) with Michael Wojtech – he wrote the book on Bark!

Bark: Get to Know Your Trees on June 22, 9:30 – 1:30

<http://vt.audubon.org/bark-get-know-your-trees>



We'd heard recent reports of a Goshawk at the Birds of Vermont Museum feeding station, so we decided to swing through the woods in search of this sometimes-aggressive raptor. Although we located two massive Goshawk stick-nests high in the pines, we never spotted the bird.

The Louisiana Waterthrush typically wades in shallow brooks and along the waters' edge. The quiet brown bird blends seamlessly with its surroundings. A flicker of movement is your only clue to its presence. We followed the brook nearly from Huntington Road until it joined the Huntington River, but failed to find this bird either. At the river we flushed a startled pair Mallard Ducks. A Belted Kingfisher noted our arrival with a cackling, raspy chortle. Red-winged Blackbirds defended their nesting territories, flashing their yellow and red epaulettes. We steadily amassed more bird species as we returned uphill past the Beaver Pond, the Hemlock Swamp and the Peeper Pond. Our on-foot

tally totaled 52 when we shifted gears to birding-by-bike.

The short pedal to Beaudry's Store surprised us with 11 bird species (species #53 to #64). We count on finding "town birds" (House Sparrow, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Starling), but didn't expect to discover a flock of Canada-bound Pine Siskins buzzing in the treetops.



At Gillette Pond we spotted two male Scarlet Tanagers, perfectly lit by the sun in the tops of two adjacent trees. One sported cadmium-red feathers, the other vermilion. Birding by ear drives my ornithological passion, but this pair fed my visual side. Just down the road this aural/visual imbalance reappeared. I came upon a pair of nondescript warbler-sized birds by the side of the road. I hadn't a clue as to their identity; I needed their song to trigger their name. They flew off before uttering a peep, anonymous and uncounted. It's good to know I have more to learn...

The last leg of Birdathon runs on a sandy single-track trail along the Winooski River. My city-cycling skills did me little good on the rolling, twisting terrain. My birding suffered from diverting my full attention to staying on my bike and on the trail. The Bank Swallows nesting colony always fascinates me. I find it odd to think of burrowing birds.

The American Woodcock wrapped up our Birdathon this year. Mark and his son Owein witnessed the courtship display flight in the sugarhouse field late in the evening. I hope to catch it next year.

# Birdathon Species List 2013

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\*Causer-count bird

1. House Wren\*
2. chicken\*
3. Red-tailed Hawk\*
4. Indigo Bunting
5. American Robin
6. Chestnut-sided Warbler
7. Ovenbird
8. Common Yellowthroat
9. Hairy Woodpecker
10. Least Flycatcher
11. Red-eyed Vireo
12. White-throated Sparrow
13. Black-capped Chickadee
14. Rose-breasted Grosbeak
15. Gray Catbird
16. Blue Jay
17. Black-throated Green Warbler
18. Blackburnian Warbler
19. Eastern Wood Pewee
20. Winter Wren
21. White-breasted Nuthatch
22. Brown Creeper
23. Hermit Thrush
24. Blue-headed Vireo
25. Wood Thrush
26. Red-breasted Nuthatch
27. American Crow
28. Yellow-rumped Warbler
29. Scarlet Tanager
30. Dark-eyed Junco
31. American Redstart
32. American Goldfinch
33. Black and White Warbler
34. Veery
35. Common Grackle
36. Baltimore Oriole
37. Song Sparrow
38. Northern Cardinal
39. Brown-headed Cowbird

40. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
41. Great-crested Flycatcher
42. Ruby-throated Hummingbird
43. Red-winged Blackbird
44. Mallard Duck
45. Bobolink
46. Belted Kingfisher
47. Eastern Phoebe
48. Purple Finch
49. Common Merganser
50. Tree Swallow
51. Swamp Sparrow
52. Yellow Warbler
53. Eastern Bluebird
54. Northern Parula
55. Broad-winged Hawk
56. Chipping Sparrow
57. Tufted Titmouse
58. Barn Swallow
59. European Starling
60. Warbling Vireo
61. Eastern Kingbird
62. Mourning Dove
63. House Sparrow
64. House Finch
65. Rock Pigeon
66. Savannah Sparrow
67. Pine Siskin
68. domestic duck\*
69. White-crowned Sparrow
70. Black-throated Blue Warbler
71. Downy Woodpecker
72. Northern Waterthrush
73. Spotted Sandpiper
74. Canada Goose
75. Pileated Woodpecker
76. Turkey Vulture
77. Wild Turkey
78. Evening Grosbeak
79. Yellow-throated Vireo
80. Northern Flicker
81. Bank Swallow
82. Ring-billed Gull
83. Wood Duck

84. Chimney Swift
85. Killdeer
86. American Woodcock