

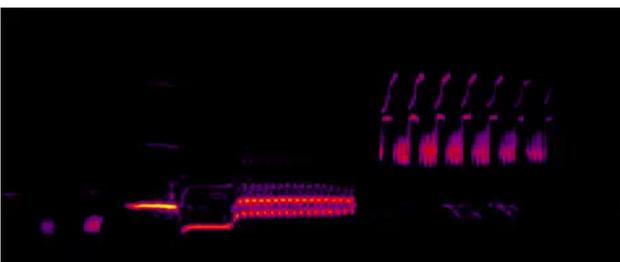
Birdathon Adventure 2014 – Audubon Vermont

By Gwendolyn Causer

Have I ever mentioned how *early* we have to wake up for Birdathon? Birds wake up much too early. Skunks, on the other hand, stay up late. At 4:45 a.m. when I woke up to make coffee and let Mitzi outside, our backyard was filled with the stink of skunk. In my pre-coffee fog I wondered if the skunk was actually up early or out late, but I was awake enough to keep Mitzi inside while the skunk waddled away.



As an ear-dominant birder (versus eye-dominant), one of my favorite exercises of Birdathon happens at the very beginning, before the binoculars come out. We gather together and tease apart the individual songs of the morning-bird chorus. This year I identified the first bird of Birdathon, the Least Flycatcher. A few years ago, when both Ella and my Mom joined in the Birdathon adventure, I remember studying the songs of all of the Vermont flycatchers in the car on the way to Birdathon that morning. It's nice to know some of my studying sticks with me..We tallied our first fifteen birds by their songs before leaving the office yard, except for the Hummingbird who darted near the nectar feeder. The Hairy Woodpecker also required a visual confirmation, comparing the length of its beak to the size of its head: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hairy_Woodpecker/id



Wood Thrush spectrogram

I just learned about a new bird-song game.!

“Train your brain to visually identify bird songs.”

It's so fun, but I digress...

(<https://bitly.com/BirdSongHero>)

Moving into the shrubby field, we amassed seven species of warblers (Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided, Mourning, Black and White, and Blackburnian). We also tallied the Veery, which was identified not by its exquisite song, but by



its “[Veer call](#).” The Veery’s my favorite bird-song of Birdathon, so I was a bit disappointed to tally the bird without the full song. Our Veery began the listing of a trio of thrushes: Veery, American Robin and Hermit Thrush – all renowned for their complex vocalizations, and all found by sound. The

Gray Catbird came next, a notorious vocal mimic, similar to the Northern Mockingbird.

Porcupines look so cute and cuddly when they’re napping high in a tree. This was the second year we’ve spotted a tree-sleeping porcupine and I’m happy (and perhaps lucky) to say that I’ve never encountered one at closer range, and neither has Mitzi.



Birds #32 through #38 (see the complete bird list at the end of the story) we found hiking up to Lookout Rock and along the Spear Trail. On the oak-lined ridge we got a good look at a nesting pair of Scarlet Tanagers. Steve helped me to identify their nest, a flimsy collec-



tion of twigs perched high in a Hemlock. As we hiked down to the Museum Trail through our demonstration timber harvest site, Steve also answered all of my forestry-for-the-birds questions. The opportunity to spend the day in the company of all of the Audubon Vermont staff is always a great learning experience for everyone.

Birds #39 through #47 we picked up at the Birds of Vermont Museum. The museum features over [500 carved wooden birds](#), representing 259 species. The woodcarvings depict Vermont’s nesting species in their natural habitats, as well as North America’s endangered and extinct species, and were carved by Robert Spear, Jr. Despite reliable reports of nest-

ing Goshawks and finding several Goshawk nests, we came up empty again this year in our annual Goshawk pursuit.

Every year we also search the edges of Sherman Hollow Brook for the secretive, often silent, splendidly camouflaged Louisiana Waterthrush. All binoculars are raised, alert for the slightest movement. This year we found not one, but a pair of Louisiana Waterthrushes hunting in the brook, zipping into the Hemlocks and even singing to each other through the woods.



Next we stopped at the [flood-transformed](#) Beaver Ponds. Tree swallows hunted insects acrobatically, while a nesting pair of Canada Geese placidly and steadfastly guarded their nest on the abandoned beaver lodge. Emerging from the Sugarbush woods, we heard the calls of an



American Redstart, a singing Veery (yippee!!), and an Eastern Phoebe, followed by a tremendous crack of thunder. We decided to hurry to shelter in the office during the downpour and make a lunch run to Beaudry's, Huntington's classic Vermont-y corner store. In "town" we spotted two city birds: a European Starling and a House Sparrow, both non-natives.

After lunch came the biking adventure, which I had to skip this year, due to a recurring shoulder injury. Birds #58 through #81 were tallied by the rest of the Audubon Vermont staff. The bikers had to "dodge thunderstorms, ride through the rain and fiord the stream crossing at Gillet Pond to avoid the heavy machinery."

Instead, Ella joined me in Burlington for a little Causer-Birdathon-ing. We began with a drizzly neighborhood dog-walk, finding only chickens and some pigeons (aka Rock Doves). Soggy, but undeterred, we continued to Oakledge Park. A line of fluffy Mallard ducklings paddled along

the shore, while Ring-billed Gulls soared overhead. I scanned the glassy lake and spotted the telltale flight of a Double-crested Cormorant, neck stretched out long and skimming low over the water's surface.

The cove at Oakledge held a great birding surprise. Just offshore swam a Loon! Loons nest in quiet, forested lakes of Vermont, but during migration season they do drop in to rest and refuel on Lake Cham-



plain. I've only seen a loon on Lake Champlain once before, far south on the lake and visible very far in the distance with binoculars. They're powerful swimmers and before we could snap a close up photo, the Loon distanced itself

from the shore. We finished our afternoon birding in the woody portion of the park, searching for woodpeckers, but none appeared. The Common Loon was our final bird of Birdathon.

The last *critter* of Birdathon, unfortunately, was a Deer Tick. I pulled one out of my skin after discovering it in a very tricky-to-spot location during my daily tick check. It had been feasting on my blood, so



I monitored myself for symptoms of Lyme over the next few days. When I began having an intense fiery, achy sensation in my bones and awful fatigue I went to the doctor and started a 2-week course of Amoxicillin. No, I never developed the classic bull's eye rash, nor a spikey fe-

ver, and it was too early to get an accurate test for Lyme antibodies, but I'm very glad to have started treatment for Lyme. My symptoms responded quickly to the antibiotics and I'm feeling fine now. Public service announcement: Do daily tick checks! For more info about Lyme in Vermont: http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/lyme/lyme_disease.aspx

The combined Audubon Staff and Causer Birdathon count totaled 87 species. The official Audubon Vermont staff count tallied 81. The Causer Count (minus the biking portion) came to 63. Not bad for a rainy day!

Birdathon Species List 2014

1. Least Flycatcher
2. Scarlet Tanager
3. Ruby-throated Hummingbird
4. Brown Creeper
5. Ovenbird
6. Red-eyed Vireo
7. Tufted Titmouse
8. American Goldfinch
9. House Wren
10. Black-capped Chickadee
11. Blue Jay
12. Indigo Bunting
13. Northern Cardinal
14. Hairy Woodpecker
15. Black-throated Green Warbler
16. Black-throated Blue Warbler
17. Common Yellowthroat
18. Chestnut-sided Warbler
19. Veery
20. Mourning Warbler

21. American Robin
22. Hermit Thrush
23. Gray Catbird
24. Black and White Warbler
25. Winter Wren
26. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
27. Red-breasted Nuthatch
28. Pileated Woodpecker
29. Rose-breasted Grosbeak
30. Blackburnian Warbler
31. White-breasted Nuthatch
32. Dark-eyed Junco
33. Blue-headed Vireo
34. Wood Thrush
35. Mourning Dove
36. Golden-crowned Kinglet
37. Yellow-rumped Warbler
38. Eastern Wood Pewee
39. American Crow
40. Baltimore Oriole
41. Wood Duck
42. Northern Flicker
43. Song Sparrow
44. Chipping Sparrow
45. Red-winged Blackbird
46. Brown-headed Cowbird
47. Common Grackle
48. Louisiana Waterthrush
49. Turkey Vulture
50. Tree Swallow
51. Canada Goose
52. American Redstart

53. Eastern Phoebe
54. Eastern Bluebird
55. Yellow Warbler
56. House Sparrow
57. European Starling
58. Warbling Vireo – biking starts here
59. Black-billed Cuckoo
60. Belted Kingfisher
61. Purple Finch
62. Barn Swallow
63. Swamp Sparrow
64. Northern Waterthrush
65. Wild Turkey
66. Great Blue Heron
67. Downy Woodpecker
68. White-throated Sparrow
69. Canada Warbler
70. Magnolia Warbler
71. Common Merganser
72. Ring-billed Gull
73. Eastern Kingbird
74. Chimney Swift
75. Common Raven
76. Spotted Sandpiper
77. Yellow-throated Vireo
78. Bank Swallow
79. Rock Pigeon
80. Barred Owl
81. American Woodcock
82. *Chicken
83. *Rock Dove

84.*Ring-billed Gull

85.*Mallard Duck

86.*Double-crested Cormorant

87.*Common Loon

* Casuer-counted bird