



# Audubon VERMONT

## Birdathon Adventure 2017

By Gwendolyn Causer, Teacher/Naturalist



This morning I asked my daughter Ella and husband Gary to reflect upon this year's Birdathon. What made this year different?

After reminding me about the 85 degree heat, Gary wondered about the 13 warblers. How do we find so many at Audubon? Do we ever see them in Burlington? While we sometimes hear a Chestnut-sided Warbler or a Common Yellowthroat passing through town during spring migration, the warblers are usually on their way to forested nesting grounds. Looking at the list of 85 species from this year's Birdathon, I counted only about 30 species that I've also seen from my backyard. So, take a trek to Audubon Vermont's Green Mountain Audubon Center while things are still in full swing.

[vt.audubon.org/visit-us](http://vt.audubon.org/visit-us)







Ella's top three highlights were: 1) the snacks. Yep, that hip pocket was filled with Gummi Bears, 2) the Swainson's Thrush story. More about that later, 3) the conversations with Ernie, Debbie, Jamie and the rest of her extended Audubon family.

Birdathon always starts early, but so do the birds. On May 17th when my 4:45 alarm rang, I already heard birds singing outside. Gary's really not a birder, so I was surprised when he mumbled to me from under the covers, "There's a bird singing outside. It's saying "pretty bird, pretty bird, pretty bird."” Whoa, nice Northern Cardinal mnemonic, but too early to count for Birdathon.



5:45 am marked the official start of Birdathon with a sighting of magnificently displaying Wild Turkeys. Our group of 12 staff and volunteer birders got to a quick start. By 6:30 our count tallied 22 species. See the full list below. Ella has been to enough Birdathons to know how hard it is to be the first person to "call" a bird. While we all had our binoculars focused on the trees and our ears tuned for hearing bird songs, Ella heard the distant drumming of a Ruffed Grouse.



Bird #17 for Ella!



While I was doing most of my birding work with my ears, we did get some sweet looks at some spectacular birds: Ruby-crowned Kinglet (photo: Howard Cheek), Magnolia Warbler (photo: Sam Fried), and Scarlet Tanager (photo: Linda Steele).



Being more of a botanist than a birder I was happily distracted by Ella and Debbie's questions and was always ready to stop for some wildflower lore or fern identification. Flowers: Striped Maple, Red Trillium, Wood Anemone (photos: me!).



Birdathon really is a team sport and this year Mark LaBarr was joined by his conservation intern Steven Lamonde. Identifying sparrows by sight is not for the novice, so when we spotted a drab sparrow in the ditch by the side of Sherman Hollow Road, we were lucky that Mark and Steven had just banded a Lincoln's Sparrow the previous day and were able to figure out the field marks to set it apart from the seven other sparrows we counted this year. This bird was a first for our Birdathon. It nests in boreal forests and was just passing through.



Lincoln's Sparrow



Savannah

Song

White-throated

White-crowned

Chipping

House

Junco



The day was getting hotter by the time we reached Sherman Hollow Brook for our yearly hunt for the Northern Waterthrush. We sent separate search parties upstream and downstream while a handful of us recovered from the heat by the cool water, but we weren't able to track one down this time.

Our trek along the Huntington River proved more exciting. A Red-tailed Hawk and hungry Tree Swallows swooped overhead while we spotted a Spotted Sandpiper on the shore. Next, we saw a pair of swallows zip into a nesting tunnel along the bank of the river. Bank Swallow? Nope, not the only option for bank-nesting swallows. Closer observations and puzzling by the experts revealed that these were Northern Rough-winged Swallows. To top it off, we spied an Osprey perched in a tree overhanging the water.

With the temperature rising into the 80's the birds quieted down and sought shelter from the heat. After pulling in some yard birds at the caretaker house we spotted only one more bird species on our hike back up to the office, a Yellow Warbler at the Peeper Pond. We wrapped up the morning with a count of 61 birds and a temperature of 80 degrees. Ella and I split off from the biking group to wind our way back to Burlington for Ella's BHS Track obligations.

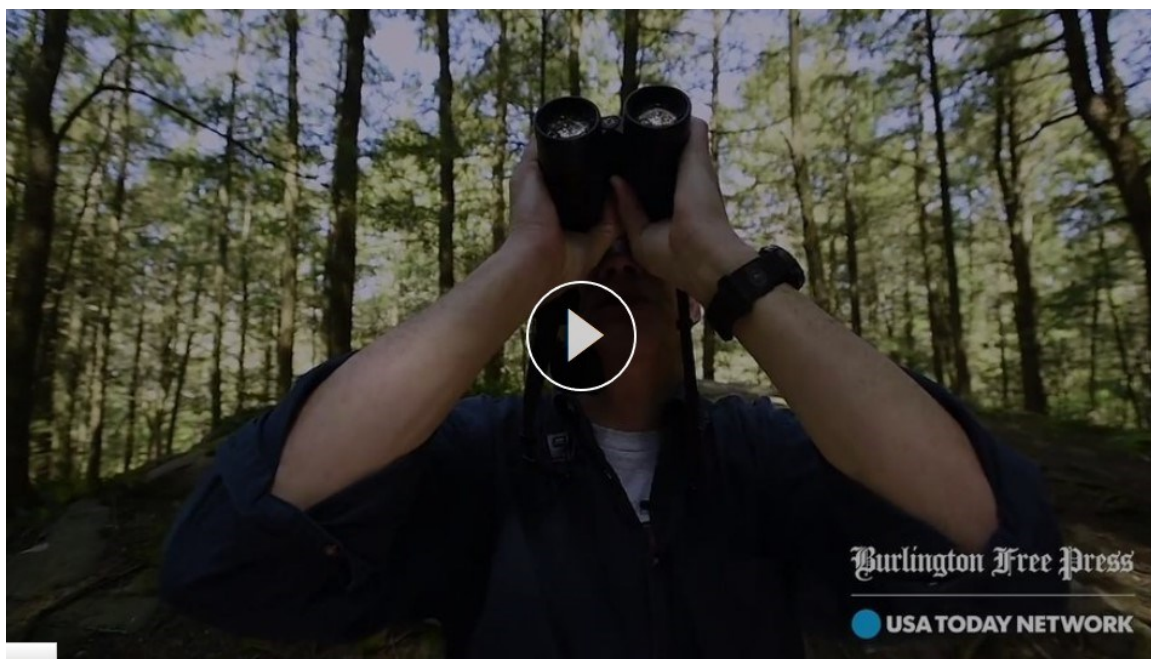




Our first stop was Richmond and Sweet Simone's for some lunch and sweets to avoid "hangry" birding. We grabbed a window seat and snagged a European Starling, a Chimney Swift, and a House Sparrow while enjoying our Bahn Mi and fruit tart. Shhhh... Don't tell the biking birders! We also added a chicken to our Causer-Count Birdathon list just before we passed the round church in Richmond.



We were running a bit short on time getting back to Burlington, so we had to choose just one birding stop on the drive home. Given last year's birding bonanza at Shelburne Pond (Bald Eagle, Ring-billed Gull, Virginia Rail, Northern Shoveler, Double-crested Cormorant, Herring Gull, Pied-billed Grebe, Wood Duck, and Caspian Tern), the choice seemed obvious. Alas, luck was not with us this year. We heard a Chipping Sparrow and eventually spied a Double-crested Cormorant, but otherwise things were quiet.



A little disappointed, we returned to our car. After seeing our binoculars and field guides, a man approached us and asked if we were birders. It took us a moment to recognize each other, but it was Burlington Free Press photographer Glenn Russell, who had joined us last year for Birdathon. He had just come from recording a story with University of Vermont's Allan Strong about whistling bird songs. He asked if we were familiar with the song of the Swainson's Thrush. Both of us enthusiastically answered yes. It's a beautiful, complex ethereal melody that you only hear when hiking at high elevations in Vermont. Glenn played us a recording of Allan imitating the song. It was spectacular. Mind-blowing. Click [here](#) to watch the BFP video. The Swainson's Thrush song comes at the very end of the video. (If you cannot access the video, do a google search for "He's not just whistlin' chickadee" and follow the link.) Compare Allan's whistling to other thrush songs: [audubon.org/learn-sounds-three-brown-thrushes](http://audubon.org/learn-sounds-three-brown-thrushes)

Back in Burlington, Ella departed for track. The temperature in Burlington hit 91 degrees. Mitzi and I decided to try our luck at the lake. It was a decidedly urban expedition. We saw Ring-billed Gulls and enjoyed the cooling breezes off of Lake Champlain. It was very quiet, bird-wise. As we were leaving Oakledge Park we found a pair of Mallard Ducks. Look closely at the photo below. The kids at the beach were amazed and delighted that the ducks were swimming so close to them. Urban birding.

Our last bird of the day was the trill of the Red-bellied Woodpecker, a newcomer in Burlington that has expanded its range northward due to climate change. 73 total species for the day.

The Audubon Vermont team had better luck and slightly lower temperatures in the afternoon. Jim reported: *Along the ride we notched some of my favorite birds including an Eastern Bluebird, Evening Grosbeak, Chimney Swift and a Merlin. I was happy to see the Merlin since it has been making a regular appearance in the Cochran Road neighborhood.* The official Audubon Vermont count landed at 85 species with a high temperature of 85 degrees.



Thank you for all of the kind notes, words of encouragement, and generous donations we've received! I've been hearing folks asking if it's too late to donate to Birdathon and our answer is: "It's never too late to donate to Birdathon!"

[Donate to Audubon Vermont](#)

- Gwen and Ella Causer

Learn more about the birds we found with [Audubon's Bird Guide.](#)

## Official Audubon Vermont Birdathon Count 2017

- 1) Wild Turkey
- 2) Least Flycatcher
- 3) American Robin
- 4) Ovenbird
- 5) Black-throated Blue Warbler
- 6) Brown Creeper
- 7) Veery
- 8) Black-capped Chickadee
- 9) Chestnut-sided Warbler
- 10) American Crow
- 11) Canada Goose
- 12) Common Yellow-throat
- 13) Winter Wren
- 14) Dark-eye Junco
- 15) Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- 16) Mourning Warbler
- 17) Ruffed Grouse
- 18) Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 19) Blue Jay
- 20) Mourning Dove
- 21) Hermit Thrush
- 22) Magnolia Warbler
- 23) Wood Thrush
- 24) Blackburnian Warbler
- 25) Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- 26) American Redstart
- 27) Red-breasted Nuthatch
- 28) Blue-headed Vireo
- 29) Common Raven
- 30) Red-eyed Vireo
- 31) Downy Woodpecker
- 32) Great-crested Flycatcher
- 33) Scarlet Tanager
- 34) Black-throated Green Warbler
- 35) Tufted Titmouse
- 36) Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 37) Black-and-white Warbler
- 38) Turkey Vulture
- 39) Eastern Phoebe
- 40) Indigo Bunting
- 41) White-throated Sparrow
- 42) Northern Flicker
- 43) American Goldfinch
- 44) Northern Cardinal
- 45) Gray Catbird
- 46) Hairy Woodpecker
- 47) Northern Parula
- 48) Ruby-throated Hummingbird

## Causer Birdathon Count 2017

- 1) Wild Turkey
- 2) Least Flycatcher
- 3) American Robin
- 4) Ovenbird
- 5) Black-throated Blue Warbler
- 6) Brown Creeper
- 7) Veery
- 8) Black-capped Chickadee
- 9) Chestnut-sided Warbler
- 10) American Crow
- 11) Canada Goose
- 12) Common Yellow-throat
- 13) Winter Wren
- 14) Dark-eye Junco
- 15) Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- 16) Mourning Warbler
- 17) Ruffed Grouse
- 18) Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 19) Blue Jay
- 20) Mourning Dove
- 21) Hermit Thrush
- 22) Magnolia Warbler
- 23) Wood Thrush
- 24) Blackburnian Warbler
- 25) Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- 26) American Redstart
- 27) Red-breasted Nuthatch
- 28) Blue-headed Vireo
- 29) Common Raven
- 30) Red-eyed Vireo
- 31) Downy Woodpecker
- 32) Great-crested Flycatcher
- 33) Scarlet Tanager
- 34) Black-throated Green Warbler
- 35) Tufted Titmouse
- 36) Yellow-rumped Warbler
- 37) Black-and-white Warbler
- 38) Turkey Vulture
- 39) Eastern Phoebe
- 40) Indigo Bunting
- 41) White-throated Sparrow
- 42) Northern Flicker
- 43) American Goldfinch
- 44) Northern Cardinal
- 45) Gray Catbird
- 46) Hairy Woodpecker
- 47) Northern Parula
- 48) Ruby-throated Hummingbird



- 49) Red-winged Blackbird
- 50) Purple Finch
- 51) Song Sparrow
- 52) Common Grackle
- 53) Lincoln's Sparrow
- 54) Baltimore Oriole
- 55) Spotted Sandpiper
- 56) Tree Swallow
- 57) Red-tailed Hawk
- 58) Osprey
- 59) Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- 60) Barn Swallow
- 61) Yellow Warbler
- 62) House Wren
- 63) Bobolink
- 64) Savannah Sparrow
- 65) Brown-headed Cowbird
- 66) Warbling Vireo
- 67) European Starling
- 68) White-crowned Sparrow
- 69) House Sparrow
- 70) Chipping Sparrow
- 71) Solitary Sandpiper
- 72) Mallard Duck
- 73) Wood Duck
- 74) White-breasted Nuthatch
- 75) Eastern Bluebird
- 76) American Kestrel
- 77) Evening Grosbeak
- 78) Common Merganser
- 79) Eastern Kingbird
- 80) Ring-billed Gull
- 81) Bank Swallow
- 82) Merlin
- 83) Rock Pigeon
- 84) Chimney Swift
- 85) Belted Kingfisher

- 49) Red-winged Blackbird
- 50) Purple Finch
- 51) Song Sparrow
- 52) Common Grackle
- 53) Lincoln's Sparrow
- 54) Baltimore Oriole
- 55) Spotted Sandpiper
- 56) Tree Swallow
- 57) Red-tailed Hawk
- 58) Osprey
- 59) Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- 60) Barn Swallow
- 61) Yellow Warbler
- 62) House Wren
- 63) Bobolink
- 64) Chicken
- 65) European Starling
- 66) Chimney Swift
- 67) House Sparrow
- 68) Chipping Sparrow
- 69) Double-crested Cormorant
- 70) Rock Pigeon
- 71) Ring-billed Gull
- 72) Mallard Duck
- 73) Red-bellied Woodpecker