

In Prince Edward County Birds Are Active 24/7

The numerical phrase “24/7” is a recent addition to our language. It means that the subject is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In Nature, most plants and animals have a specific time in which their activities take place. Collectively, however, there is not a single moment in which something wild is not active. That is why my last week’s Birdathon spanned nearly 24 hours.

For those who missed my previous column, on May 26 I raised money for the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory by birding in Prince Edward County for 24 hours. Thanks to those who sponsored me - details are given at the end of this column for those who would still like to do so.

Bruce Ripley, a fine Kingston naturalist, and I started birding at midnight near Wellington. The night was calm and clear. Our first stop was a large swamp accessed by walking an old rail line. At the wetland we immediately began to tally birds. Common Moorhen, Virginia and Sora rails, Marsh Wren, Swamp Sparrow and Least Bittern, an endangered species in Ontario, were quickly tallied. Over the next five hours we added a few more nocturnal birds including three species of owls.

By dawn we were at the tip of Traverse Point, a key area for migrating birds. As soon as the light was adequate, we began to identify ducks flying over Lake Ontario. White-winged Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks (formerly “Oldsquaw”) were expected and seen; two Black Scoters were a surprise find. Next we hit the woods in search of songbirds. Fortunately many were in song and our list grew rapidly. Some, such as Yellow Warblers, were local nesters; others, such as Blackpoll Warblers, were migrants on their way north. By late morning we left the Wildlife Reserve and headed to Wapoos Point where a flooded field promised shorebirds.

Its promise was kept and a number of sandpipers including Black-bellied Plovers and Short-billed Dowitchers were picked up. Then we headed west through open fields and alvars where Grasshopper Sparrows, Eastern Bluebirds, and Upland Sandpipers were encountered. A quick trip to Sandbanks Provincial Park yielded a few more species, including a pair of nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers. To the north and south of that fascinating park we added Black and Common terns, as well as other species.

We returned to Point Traverse, our list still with a few holes unfilled. A late evening Gray-cheeked Thrush filled one. A last minute trip to the shorebird spot filled in a couple more. At 9:30 p.m., with all expected nocturnal species under our belt, we ended our Birdathon. Despite missing a few common species, our total count was 149.

The real winner, of course, is the Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory.,