

You will recall that I recently told you that I was about to do the Great Canadian Birdathon to help raise funds for projects to protect our birds and their habitats. As a refresher (in case you missed my previous column – shame on you!), each year in May, thousands of birders go out across Canada and beyond to try to see as many species of birds as possible in a 24 hour period and of course to raise money to help them. Each birder seeks sponsors who will donate a lump sum amount to help this important cause. Organized by Bird Studies Canada, the goal this year is to raise \$200,000 across Canada and my personal goal was set at \$1000.

On May 24 and 25, I went out with two of my birder friends and started the long 24 hour ordeal. We began in Algonquin Park at about 11 a.m. on the 24th and scouted out some of the rarities for the next two hours before our ‘thon began at 1 p.m. But you may recall that the weather was pretty cool that weekend so we had some trouble finding birds since almost nothing sang. A huge part of the success of a venture like this is to hear the birds so that you don’t have to spend time looking for them – they find you! Suffice to say that we missed most of the target birds, but did manage to see 5 Gray Jays and an Olive-sided Flycatcher, two target species. About 4 p.m. we gave up on this locale and headed south to a birding hotspot known as the Carden Alvar near Kirkfield. This is a unique habitat that hosts many rare and even endangered species. One road in particular is sought out by birders from around the world. Wylie Road is a small dirt road that is about 7 kms. in length. We spent several hours on this one small stretch finding almost every bird we sought. Included were the very rare Loggerhead Shrike and Golden-winged Warbler. Sandhill Cranes bugled and Nighthawks and Woodcocks “peented” from the meadows. Upland Sandpipers broadcast their “wolf whistle” calls from fence posts, while Grasshopper Sparrows buzzed in the fields. Bluebirds, Meadowlarks and Bobolinks serenaded as well. Riding the crest of this success, we left Carden and spent the night looking for marsh birds and owls, finding several. At dawn on the 25th, we were in Bowmanville at Westside Marsh and soon thereafter at Darlington Provincial Park and Oshawa’s Second Marsh. It was at the latter location that things started to go really well. We have hoped to see an uncommon sandpiper called a Whimbrel that migrates during a narrow window in late May. Well see them we did – over 600 birds in several flocks. Mixed in were several other types of sandpipers, ducks and Brant (a small coastal goose). From here we travelled to Thickson Woods in Whitby and added several migrant warblers, vireos, thrushes and flycatchers. Stops elsewhere in Durham yielded more ducks, hundreds of sandpipers, an uncommon gull, terns, woodpeckers, a few hawks and falcons and finches ... The day finished at 1 p.m. at Nonquon sewage lagoons near Port Perry, where we added our last species of ducks, shorebirds, a Coot, Osprey and the endangered Black Tern. All said, we found 171 species of birds on our Big Day – not quite a record but an amazing day nonetheless. And to top it off, I raised over \$2600 thanks to the generosity of people like you!

Remember that 25% of the money I raise goes to the local nature club (North Durham Nature) to help fund their own local nature-based projects including events for kids. Thanks for helping me help our birds!!