**We Had A Birdin’ Blast on May 28, 2016!**

**Bird-a-Thon Results**

**by Jeff Walters**

I woke up around 5:00 am on May 28, rather tired yet excited. Yes—today was Birdathon day! This was a day to see as many species of birds as possible while raising funds for the Alaska Songbird Institute. Although it was only 37 degrees at my house, I knew the birding would be hot hot hot today—just like the people on my team! (And the temperature soon warmed up; it was nearly 70 degrees in the afternoon.) We had a mostly clear and calm day for our quest.

Since I had decided to count only the species seen by at least two members of my team, I didn’t plan to count the early birds in my yard. I gathered my gear and rushed to my car, trying to ignore the sounds of a Black-capped Chickadee, juncos, and a Swainson’s Thrush.

I arrived at Creamer’s Field at 5:58 am, just ahead of team member Karen. I had never met Karen before, but she was up for a long day of birding. She told me she had been to the previous three Arctic Audubon Saturday field trips and she wanted to learn even more. I was impressed with her positive energy and genuine interest. As we waited for our other three team members to arrive, Karen and I heard and saw our first bird: a **Dark-eyed Junco.** Over 20 **Sandhill Cranes** stalked through the fields, **American Robins** and **White-crowned Sparrows** were singing, and we walked to the front of the field where we saw **American Wigeons, Mallards,** **Northern Pintails,** and **Northern Shovelers**. Along College Road **Yellow Warblers, Yellow-rumped Warblers,** and **Hammond’s Flycatchers** were singing, and Karen was the first to hear the drumming of a **woodpecker (sp?)** in the distance. We believe it was a Downy or a Hairy, but we weren’t sure which one. Since we saw neither one later in the day, we counted this anyway as one species.

Soon Cyndie, Nancy, and Susan arrived. Two **Common Redpolls** fed in a bush as we walked back to the farmhouse. **Tree** and **Violet-green Swallows** flew around us, we watched **Canada Geese**, and we were surprised and happy as **7 Snow Geese** flew in and landed in the field. We heard a **Common Raven** and saw a few **Rock Pigeons**. We walked to the seasonal pond, where Nancy quickly spotted a male **Blue-winged Teal** amongst many Shovelers. We also saw and/or heard **Lesser Yellowlegs, Lincoln’s Sparrows, Northern Waterthrushes** and **2 Horned Grebes.** We took time to marvel at the vivid colors of a singing Yellow Warbler, and then braved the first of many many many many many many many many many many many many many mosquitoes as we looked for—and saw—**2 singing male Blackpoll Warblers** near the start of the Boreal Forest trail. We walked briskly along the trail and some of us tried *not* to use mosquito repellant; I think we all succumbed either to repellant or to mosquito bites. Along the trail Karen was the first to note the song of a **Wilson’s Warbler** (she had learned this song on a previous Audubon walk—she had obviously been paying attention!) and Cyndie pointed out the sound of a winnowing **Wilson’s Snipe** overhead. We also heard **Swainson’s Thrushes** and the two-note call of a **Black-capped Chickadee.** As we emerged from the forest and returned to the parking lot, we stopped to see nesting **Cliff Swallows** on a barn. We also scanned the field and found **2 Greater White-fronted Geese.** **Savannah Sparrows** were singing as well, and a **Rusty Blackbird** called as it flew over.

As we left Creamer’s Field, we realized the 7 Snow Geese were feeding next to the front parking lot. They allowed very close approach. It was worth a few minutes to stop to admire them!

We next drove nearby to Wedgewood Resort and walked around Wander Lake. Here we heard our first **Townsend’s Warbler**. Three **Bohemian Waxwings** flew over, **Solitary** and **Spotted Sandpipers** called, and a **Belted Kingfisher** rattled and perched on a wire for all to see. At the far end of the lake we saw a **Red-necked Grebe** and a **Mew Gull** on nests. We also stopped to watch an **Orange-crowned Warbler** singing in the sunlight and to learn its song; it was surprisingly pretty in an understated, olive, Orange-crowned Warbler kind of way.

Next: on to Tanana Lakes/South Cushman with a stop for coffee en route. This was a great stop (Tanana Lakes, not the coffee. Well, the coffee was great too. . . .) One of the first birds we saw from the wooded trail was a **Whimbrel** on the muddy shore. Great views! Further along we saw 3 **Black-bellied Plovers,** a pair of **Buffleheads, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers,** and **Pectoral Sandpipers**. We studied a pair of **Greater Scaup** (and, unfortunately, although we studied other scaup later in the day, we couldn’t convince ourselves 100% that we saw Lesser Scaup even though we surely did. Insert sad face here). As we walked out on the mud, we saw 3 Spotted Sandpipers—it seemed that one male was being interrupted by another as he was trying for some privacy with a female in the wide open public mudflats. A chase ensued. Meanwhile an adult **Bald Eagle** flew over the treetops, and Karen drew our attention to a dark *Buteo* being “attacked” by Mew Gulls overhead—a **“Harlan’s” Hawk**. We then walked down the dike road to the deeper pond on the left side, where a male **White-winged Scoter** rested. A **Hermit Thrush** sang, some **Herring Gulls** flew over towards the dump, a **Northern Flicker** flew by, and Cyndie, Nancy, and Susan saw a **Black-billed Magpie** squawking in the shrubbery. A few distant ducks included our first **Green-winged Teal** of the day, plus 2 **Common Goldeneyes.**

We were pleased as we left Tanana Lakes. We drove a few miles down the Richardson Highway where we saw a pair of **Osprey** at a distant nest. One bird was incubating; its head was just above the edge of the massive nest.

On to the float ponds! I had called ahead to get “permission” from Orrin (?) to bird there; I didn’t want to get stopped and questioned as Philip Martin had a few days earlier. (Maybe Philip just looks shadier than us. . . .) As we drove in, we spotted a male **Surf Scoter**. We parked and found a variety of peeps, plus **2 Stilt Sandpipers** that allowed close approach and excellent study. 2 **Bonaparte’s Gulls** and many Mew Gulls flew over many ducks. Jeff tried to turn a Mew Gull that wasn’t in summer adult plumage into a Ring-billed Gull, but that didn’t work. It DID have a black tip on the bill!

We drove around to the front (terminal) airport ponds, which were very quiet. We did admire a Red-necked Grebe on a nest and saw some baby Mallard ducklings. By now it was 12:20 and Susan, Cyndie, and Nancy had to leave. Although our team was diminished, Karen and I continued birding. There were two of us, which made us plural, so there was still no “I” in team and the Birdin’ Blast continued.

But things slowed down and quieted down a lot. Karen and I drove around on some of the dikes along the Tanana River. We did see **7 silent swans (probably Trumpeter)** fly over, soon to become 7 swans a-swimming (I’m sure), and we also studied a black-legged **Baird’s Sandpiper** that stood out amongst several Semipalms. I was disappointed that no Alder Flycatchers were singing—we listened for them everywhere today, to no avail.

Karen and I continued to Smith Lake, where we *finally* heard a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**. Two males **Gadwalls** fed across the lake, and a female was probably with them. Gadwall was our 65th and final species of the day. Yet we gamely continued on to the peat ponds, where we had good views of 2 more Stilt Sandpipers and a pair of Greater Scaup. We really tried to find a classic-pointy-headed Lesser Scaup but no luck. . . .

Karen and I tried a few other areas—Mayo’s field, the musk ox farm, along Miller Hill Road—hoping to find Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee. We ***did*** happen to see Karen’s husband jogging by with their young energetic dog. Fairbanks is a small town!

Karen had to leave by 4:30 so I drove her back to her car at Creamer’s Field after 4:00. We totaled 65 species. It was down to just me—no more team. I was tired and went home. But I think it’s safe to say that we all had a birdin’ blast!

(Note: After I went home and took a long nap, I drove to Fred Meyer’s around 8 pm. And I saw a **Short-eared Owl** flying over the UAF fields!)

Notable species we missed: **Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, loons, American Kestrel, Least Sandpiper, owls, Alder Flycatcher** (I really thought at least one would be back by now. . . . ), **Gray Jay, Bank Swallow, Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Fox Sparrow.** Next year!!

Species List: Birdin’ Blast Birdathon

May 28, 2016

1. Greater White-fronted Goose
2. Snow Goose
3. Canada Goose
4. Swan (Trumpeter?)
5. Gadwall
6. American Wigeon
7. Mallard
8. Blue-winged Teal
9. Northern Shoveler
10. Northern Pintail
11. Green-winged Teal
12. Greater Scaup

(several scaup (sp?) as well. . . )

1. Surf Scoter
2. White-winged Scoter
3. Bufflehead
4. Common Goldeneye
5. Horned Grebe
6. Red-necked Grebe
7. Osprey
8. Bald Eagle
9. “Harlan’s” Red-tailed Hawk
10. Sandhill Crane
11. Black-bellied Plover
12. Semipalmated Plover
13. Spotted Sandpiper
14. Solitary Sandpiper
15. Lesser Yellowlegs
16. Whimbrel
17. Semipalmated Sandpiper
18. Baird’s Sandpiper
19. Pectoral Sandpiper
20. Stilt Sandpiper
21. Wilson’s Snipe
22. Bonaparte’s Gull
23. Mew Gull
24. Herring Gull
25. Rock Pigeon
26. Belted Kingfisher
27. “Yellow-shafted” Flicker
28. woodpecker (sp?)
29. Hammond’s Flycatcher
30. Black-billed Magpie
31. Common Raven
32. Tree Swallow
33. Violet-green Swallow
34. Cliff Swallow
35. Black-capped Chickadee
36. Ruby-crowned Kinglet
37. Swainson’s Thrush
38. Hermit Thrush
39. American Robin
40. Bohemian Waxwing
41. Orange-crowned Warbler
42. Yellow Warbler
43. Yellow-rumped Warbler
44. Townsend’s Warbler
45. Blackpoll Warbler
46. Northern Waterthrush
47. Wilson’s Warbler
48. Savannah Sparrow
49. Lincoln’s Sparrow
50. White-crowned Sparrow
51. Dark-eyed Junco
52. Rusty Blackbird
53. Common Redpoll