



# The Red-eyed Wearios'

## ***Baillie Birdathon 2009***

**Point Pelee National Park**

**5:00 p.m. May 14 – 5:00 p.m. May 15**

*Editor's Note.* Gay McDougall and Betsy McFarlane have been participating individually in the Baillie Birdathon for several years. In 2009 Jean Bacon, Averill Craig and Peter Gruner, joined them to form a Baillie team calling itself *The Red-eyed Wearios*. How apt that name was to prove!

After a ten-hour drive on Tuesday May 12, the *Red-eyed Wearios* arrived at Point Pelee, accompanied by Jean De Marre, whose birding skills and good humour were to be great assets. We started our Birdathon at first light the next day, and received very valuable assistance from Jean Demers and Clémence Soulard whom we met on the trail. However, pouring rain, high winds and threatened thunderstorms put paid to birding in the afternoon. The weather forecast suggested that Friday would be the most propitious day to try again, but we did so well while out scouting on Thursday that we declared the start to our Birdathon at 5.00 p.m. that evening, to finish 24 hours later.

Around DeLaurier Homestead we had great views of Eastern Bluebirds, Swainson's Thrush, Red-headed Woodpecker, Chimney Swifts and a juvenile Bald Eagle which flew overhead. On the way to nearby Hillman Marsh we saw Horned Larks and our only American Kestrel, while at the marsh itself we found Mute Swan, several species of duck, Common and Caspian Tern and various shorebirds including Semi-palmated Plover, Willet and Dunlin, but no Common Egrets noted the day before. Returning to DeLaurier in the gloaming, we heard American Woodcock "pinting" and saw several extraordinary aerial displays; as a bonus we were "buzzed" by a low-flying Common Nighthawk.

Up at 4:30 a.m. again on Friday (fuelled by a large high-cal breakfast) and accompanied by Sophie Cauchon and André Pelletier, we took the 6:00 a.m. trolley to the tip of the Pelee peninsula. There the waters were calm, unlike on Wednesday when the winds had whipped up waves on Lake Erie that looked suitable for surfing! This most southern point of Canada was lit by a beautiful sunrise, providing a "rosy-fingered" background for sightings of Red-breasted Mergansers and Bonaparte's Gull, while the bushes sheltered Blue-winged and Prairie Warblers.

Sunlit Tilden Woods afforded excellent views of a good many warbler species (not all neck-achingly high!), including Northern Waterthrush, Blackpoll and a glowing Northern Parula. Joining a crowd looking hard for an unusual western Townsend's Warbler reported to be in the area, we were only able to identify its eastern look-alike, the Black-throated Green (a beautiful bird nevertheless). Here as elsewhere every second bird seemed to be a Yellow Warbler (we must have seen hundreds). Baltimore and Orchard Orioles were also frequent wherever we went, and the song of our namesake Red-eyed Vireo seemed omnipresent. Whenever we glanced at the sky there was a Turkey Vulture or a Double-crested Cormorant.

A coffee stop at the visitor centre was curtailed by a mad dash back to Tilden to catch a reported Olive-sided Flycatcher, which we found displaying itself to an admiring public. Returning at a more normal pace, Betsy found us a gorgeous male Canada Warbler in the bushes behind the centre. We then turned down the Woodland Trail, where highlights included a female Wood Duck on a branch, several Scarlet Tanagers, Philadelphia Vireo, and a pair of amorous House Wrens that had taken up residence in a broken tree-trunk close to the path. A Mourning Warbler at first seemed elusive, but then this handsome male obligingly posed for us in a sunlit patch.

After recouping our energies with a sausage or a veggie burger (no time for a gourmet picnic today), we calculated that we had seen almost 90 species. However, our target was at least 100, so it was off to White Pine and the Chinquapin Oak Trail where we found the Red-bellied Woodpecker whose nest cavity we had spotted previously, and our first Wilson's Warbler. A stop at the Marsh Boardwalk produced Marsh Wrens and Common Yellowthroats in the cattails. Pausing at the park gates to see Great Horned Owl chicks on the nest, we drove very slowly with frequent stops, along the onion fields back towards Hillman Marsh. A farmyard produced Bank and Cliff Swallows, and our only Song Sparrow sang from the side of a dyke. A strutting Ring-necked Pheasant brought us up to 99 species. Strangely, we had not seen several normally common species. Surely number 100 would not be a lowly Rock Pigeon? (Yes, we were still missing one - and a cowbird.) Happily, the next species was American Goldfinch – not uncommon, but rather more beautiful!

Having achieved our century, sighting quality increased almost immediately thanks to the incredible eye of André Pelletier who, while driving, spotted a solitary Sandhill Crane feeding in a far-off field. The rest needed scopes to admire both this bird, and the single Ruddy Turnstone that Betsy noticed in a field full of Black-bellied Plover. The parking lot at Hillman Marsh was packed, so we were particularly pleased to have done our count there the previous afternoon. However, on the periphery of the marsh we were able to add Common Merganser to our list, and by 5:00 p.m. had managed 106 species, including 22 species of warbler. Weary, and somewhat red-eyed after three days in the attempt, we called an end to our birding marathon. We had missed some previously seen species, but had added new ones too, and we had thoroughly enjoyed our experience.

The Red-eyed Wearios are delighted to have raised over \$3500 for the McGill Bird Observatory and Bird Studies Canada! We are grateful for the generous support and encouragement of all our sponsors. Thank you.

*The Wearios*

# List of Species Observed by The Red-eyed Wearios

Canada Goose	Tree Swallow
Mute Swan	Barn Swallow
Wood Duck	Cliff Swallow
Gadwall	Bank Swallow
American Wigeon	Carolina Wren
Mallard	House Wren
Blue-winged Teal	Marsh Wren
Green-winged Teal	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Red-breasted Merganser	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Ruddy Duck	Eastern Bluebird
Ring-necked Pheasant	Swainson's Thrush
Wild Turkey	Wood Thrush
Double-crested Cormorant	American Robin
Great Blue Heron	Gray Catbird
Turkey Vulture	European Starling
Bald Eagle	Cedar Waxwing
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Blue-winged Warbler
Sandhill Crane	Nashville Warbler
Black-bellied Plover	Northern Parula
Semipalmated Plover	Yellow Warbler
Killdeer	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Magnolia Warbler
Willet	Cape May Warbler
Ruddy Turnstone	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Dunlin	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Short-billed Dowitcher	Black-throated Green Warbler
American Woodcock	Blackburnian Warbler
Bonaparte's Gull	Prairie Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Bay-breasted Warbler
Herring Gull	Blackpoll Warbler
Caspian Tern	Black-and-white Warbler
Common Tern	American Redstart
Mourning Dove	Ovenbird
Rock Pigeon	Northern Waterthrush
Great Horned Owl	Mourning Warbler
Common Nighthawk	Common Yellowthroat
Chimney Swift	Wilson's Warbler
Red-headed Woodpecker	Canada Warbler
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Scarlet Tanager
Downy Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Song Sparrow
Eastern Wood-Pewee	White-crowned Sparrow
Least Flycatcher	Northern Cardinal
Great Crested Flycatcher	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Eastern Kingbird	Indigo Bunting
Blue-headed Vireo	Red-winged Blackbird
Warbling Vireo	Common Grackle
Philadelphia Vireo	Brown-headed Cowbird
Red-eyed Vireo	Orchard Oriole
Blue Jay	Baltimore Oriole
American Crow	House Finch
Horned Lark	American Goldfinch
Purple Martin	House Sparrow



Friday, May 15, 2009. Sunrise at the Tip.



Red-eyed Wearios and friends: Jean De Marre, Jean Bacon, Averill Craig, Gay Gruner, André Pelletier, Betsy McFarlane, Peter Gruner.



Our usual modest lunch (above) was forsaken for the quick meal offered by the Friends of Point Pelee.



We could hear the song of the Baltimore Oriole on every trail.