



**The Red-eyed Wearios – Baillie Birdathon Report 2013**  
**Betsy McFarlane, Gay McDougall Gruner, Averill Craig**  
**Western Quebec – Eastern Ontario**  
**Wednesday evening – Thursday evening, 22-23 May**

In a Baillie Birdathon, teams or individuals try to see as many species as possible during a 24-hour period. For their 2013 Birdathon, Red-eyed Wearios Betsy McFarlane, Gay McDougall-Gruner and Averill Craig chose to return to Quebec/Ontario. Determined to try and better the 106 species which we had identified in those areas in 2011, we decided to add some extra locations within the same general area, and to employ a new tactic: rather than start very early in the morning and bird till we dropped in the evening, we felt we might improve our chances of getting some nocturnal species if we were to start our Birdathon around dusk on Wednesday, and complete it 24 hours later in a different location. As always our designated beneficiary was the McGill Bird Observatory (MBO) banding station, located adjacent to the Morgan Arboretum in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue.

There had been a lot of rain in the previous days, raising water levels and making a lot of the ground muddy and slippery. The weather forecast for Thursday was rather dire, and we were tempted to postpone our day, but decided to risk it in the hope that we could dodge the threatened thunderstorms.

So, according to plan, on Wednesday evening Gay and Averill took up position outside a large four-chimney building on McGill's McDonald campus in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, where they joined Alison Hackney, who was conducting a Chimney Swift survey there. Chimney Swift numbers are dropping as so many chimneys are now capped, but happily many swifts could be heard and seen swirling around the campus, and gradually as darkness approached, a few individuals were seen diving into one or other of the four chimneys to roost for the night.

Finally, around 8:45 pm a large number of swifts congregated above us, and then disappeared like reverse smoke down the largest chimney; one or two which had initially gone into a smaller chimney, crawled out and then flew into the large one to join their friends - Chimney Swifts like company! Alison counted a total of 85 going into that one, with only six swifts remaining in the more individual accommodation offered by the smaller chimneys. While we were waiting for the swifts to do their thing, we were also very pleased to get two Common Nighthawks flying in the area, as well as more mundane Starlings and Rock Pigeons. An auspicious start to the Birdathon!



In the morning the three of us met at Betsy's house, and by 5:20 a.m. we were at the Morgan Arboretum. It had rained heavily in the night, and the skies were overcast, the trees were still dripping and the mosquitoes hungry, but nothing worse than that was threatening. As we headed off through the wet grass towards "Blossom Corner" the first bird-call of the day was the unmistakable "teacher, Teacher, TEACHER, TEACHER..." coming from an Ovenbird in the woods adjacent to the path. Betsy's extraordinarily acute "birding ear" was invaluable here, as we picked up several other Warblers such as Northern Waterthrush, Tennessee, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue, Blackpoll, Yellow,

as well as our signature bird: the Red-eyed Vireo (“Here I am – where are you?”), the first of many calling to us that day. Warbling Vireos were also heard. In a small pond by the path we saw a Mallard shepherding a brood of tiny ducklings, while overhead we had Great Crested Flycatcher, American Goldfinch, a White-breasted Nuthatch, Scarlet Tanager, Chipping and Song Sparrows, Downy Woodpecker, the fluting sound of a Hermit Thrush and many American Crows and Black-capped Chickadees. Before moving over to the adjacent McGill Bird Observatory, a handsome dark blue Indigo Bunting serenaded us in the parking lot.

By 6:10 we had moved over to the adjacent MBO, where Gay and Betsy joined Jean Demers and Clémence Soulard for part of the daily census round of the property, recording the numbers of all the birds encountered en route. Meanwhile, Averill, who had fallen and broken her shoulder earlier in the year in London on the way to the opera (it’s a long story!), was still feeling a bit nervous of slippery paths and stayed behind near the banding station. The decision to do so was strengthened by the fact that it was now apparent that the elastic in the waist of her insect-repelling birding pants had deteriorated drastically since they were last worn, and she had failed to pack a belt – with the farcical consequence that the trousers were constantly descending to danger point, and she looked like a mutton-dressed-as-lamb Rasta fan!

However, despite this ludicrous handicap, she did get excellent views of a few members of the many species that Betsy and Gay were identifying on their census walk (for instance a House Wren emerging from a nest box, Tree Swallows, a tree full of Cedar Waxwings, Grey Catbird, a beautiful male Bluebird on top of windmill) and flying Canada Geese. She also enjoyed being close up to birds that had been carefully extracted from the mist-nets, and were being brought into the banding station in soft cotton bags, identified, measured, weighed, banded, photographed and released. A beautiful Blackpoll Warbler was a highlight of that.



Gay and Betsy’s walk produced some 30 new species for the Wearios’ rapidly growing list, especially in the conifers near E-1 net. In addition to more those already mentioned, new warbler species included Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, Nashville, Northern Parula, Bay-breasted, and Myrtle. Betsy also heard a Canada Warbler, which is one of the latest warblers to migrate. Perhaps it was this smart-looking male, with his bright yellow breast and distinctive black speckled “necklace” which was banded at the MBO a couple of days after we were there? Seen or heard, the Canada Warbler is always especially welcome since sadly, despite its name, it is a threatened species in this country.



Bank Swallows and Cliff Swallows were both seen, as were Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers. Also new were Lincoln’s and Swamp Sparrows, Eastern Phoebe and Eastern Wood-Pewee, Purple Finch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Veery and Wood Thrush, unmistakable with its beautiful fluting, gurgling song. By 7:30 a.m. the Wearios’ list already stood at 60 species - pretty darned good we thought, as we fortified ourselves with lox and cream cheese bagels and yummy egg-salad sandwiches prepared by Betsy!

Working our way west towards the Quebec/Ontario border, our next stop was the St-Lazare Pinery, where we parked by the side of the road, and walked in. We had hoped to pick up a few species that

prefer this sort of habitat such as Cape May Warbler but if they were there, they didn't make their presence known, and our only addition to the list was Golden-crowned Kinglet. Slightly disappointed, we headed for Mont-Rigaud. There although the habitat showed interesting potential, it was getting later in the day and we did not have a great many species. The only new ones were Brown-headed Cowbird and Barn Swallow. However, en route from Mont-Rigaud to the next stop (the St-Lazare Sandpits) we were also able to add Winter Wren, Sharp-shinned Hawk (our first raptor), Bobolink, Common Raven and Ring-billed Gull.

As it was a working day, the Saint-Lazare Sandpits had some noisy heavy machinery in operation, but we knew that various shore-birds are regularly reported from there, and sure enough we were able to identify Spotted Sandpiper, Dunlin, Killdeer, Solitary Sandpiper and Semipalmated Sandpaper, as well as a couple of Common Terns occupying a small islet. In the trees and other vegetation around the sandpits, we also found Brown Thrasher, Vesper Sparrow, Field Sparrow, and Least Flycatcher and identified a Mourning Warbler, which was singing down below.

Setting off across the flat agricultural landscape around St-Clet, ON, we were very pleased to be able to add Horned Lark, American Pipit, American Wigeon, Alder Flycatcher, and even House Sparrow, but we kept a particularly sharp eye out for our target bird "Lew", the leucistic (partially albino) male Red-winged Blackbird which we had seen and photographed on our 2011 Baillie Birdathon. We had been reliably informed that such a bird had been seen in the same area again this year, so we were very keen to see him and to try and get a good photo to reproduce in our report.



Suddenly, Betsy, who was driving, halted abruptly, and pointed to a clump of trees on the other side of the very same field beside chemin Ste-Julie in which we had seen him before (though further away this time). We jumped out, set up our telescopes and ... YES!!! ... there, posing nicely in a dead tree and contrasting well with the sky, was a very handsome partially leucistic Red-winged Blackbird, looking in extremely fine fettle, the unusual white edges to the wing feathers visible even from across the field. Gay had brought along a camera with a good zoom lens, and despite the distance she was able to take several shots. Above is a close up from the clearest photo of the bird which we saw this year.



We had to get on with the Birdathon, so after a few minutes spent admiring our boy, we set again this time for Lance Laviolette's delightful farm, where we had stopped just inside the entrance to look over the fields. We were greeted by a loud chorus of American Toads, whose long, pleasant trill many people mistake the sound for that of crickets. With this noise in the background, we were almost immediately surprised by an Upland Sandpiper, which suddenly flew quite close above our heads, did a little quivery thng in the air and (not so gracefully!) landed in the field beside us; it was quite a spectacular sight.

The two other new birds seen on Lance's property were a Yellow-shafted Flicker and the first of several Wild Turkeys (initially the head of the Turkey, peering over the surrounding vegetation like a periscope, was all that we could see ...)



We did an interim count while stopped for a quick coffee break shortly before 1:00 p.m. and found that our list already stood at 90 species - now we were really getting excited and hopeful that by the end of the day we could exceed our previous grand total of 106!

The sartorial side was looking up too, since at this point Gay found a rather elegant fringed pashmina/scarf in her trunk, which she kindly offered to Averill to use in place of a belt. Its pale green colour even matched the Paisley pattern on her rubber boots! What a relief that was – a long fringed scarf peaking out beneath a jacket may look odd, or perhaps even inadvertently suggest a parody of a religious garment, but it is infinitely to be preferred to having the crotch of one's trousers almost around the knees - a friend in need is a friend indeed!

We headed next for the boardwalk of the lovely Alfred Peat-bog, spotting en-route a Great Blue Heron and our first (late-rising!) Turkey Vulture floating on a thermal as the temperature had begun to warm up. The Alfred Bog is a little piece of boreal forest, hundreds of miles south of anything like it, which gives refuge to many plants and animals that were stranded as the warming climate pushed the boreal forest northward.



However, in the early afternoon and with storm clouds threatening from the west, the birding was a bit disappointing, since as had been the case in 2011, we failed to see or hear the Clay-coloured Sparrows, which are known to frequent it. A soaking from a short but heavy hail-shower made us beat a hasty retreat to the car, but it did bring out a White-throated Sparrow. We left with the thought that should we go there again another year, we might try to do so at a different time of day.

Happily, when we got to the Alfred Sewage Lagoons at 3:00 p.m. the storm clouds had passed, and some birds were to be seen from the path (a diving Pied-billed Grebe and a singing Marsh Wren). However, once we had climbed the observation tower and could use our telescopes, we were able to count seven species of duck which were swimming around (Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Duck, Redhead, American Green-winged Teal, American Black Duck, Gadwall and Blue-winged Teal), along with Common Gallinule and American Coot, and a couple of Wilson's Phalaropes. Meanwhile on the sides of one of the lagoons somewhat unexpectedly we saw several late-migrating Snow Geese, as well as some more shorebirds, which included not only a good sized-group of Black-bellied Plovers, but also examples of Semipalmated Plover and Greater Yellowlegs.

In 2011 we had done very little birding after our visit to the Alfred Sewage Lagoons, and eating our supper at the Hudson Inn. This time however, since we still had plenty of delicious sandwiches and other goodies, we decided we could get more birding in if we had a picnic supper. Accordingly, we set off for Cooper Marsh. Situated in the Lake St. Francis area of the St. Lawrence River, Cooper Marsh Conservation Area offers an attractive interpretation of marshland, treed swamp, upland meadows,

forested areas, wildflower fields, isolated ponds, meandering streams and agricultural land seeded with lure crops for waterfowl – and picnic tables ...

We arrived at Cooper Marsh at 6:00 p.m. and set out right away, as we hoped that we might add to our rather dismal raptor total with the sight of an Osprey, since the marsh boasts a nesting platform. What a good decision that was! On the way to where the platform could be seen, we saw a Green Heron, and then as the trees thinned out and the platform came into view ... there was a nest on top of it, and two little fluffy heads could be seen poking above it – Osprey chicks! No sign of an adult on the nest, but then we realized that not too far away, very visible to the naked eye on its perch in a dead tree, there was a vigilant Osprey parent, its gaze seemingly focused on us! This sight of this beautifully marked bird really was quite a thrill. We were even more pleased when we spotted what we thought was a second Osprey flying rather further away – but when we got the binoculars out it wasn't an one after all – it was a Bald Eagle! Extremely pleased with these two raptors, we then headed for the deck of the visitor centre, where we got excellent views of the only swallow species we had been missing up to this point: a good number of Purple Martins were setting up house there. We also heard the “boom” of an American Bittern and the “kek-kek-kek-kek” of Wilson’s Snipe.



Very happy with the results of this visit, we retired to the picnic tables and polished off our supper sandwiches, so that we could go and make a quick visit to the nearby South Lancaster public wharf in the hope of seeing something different. We drove down to the wharf's end past a series of summer cottages or boathouses, and were immediately able to spot a Common Loon in the water and a Double-crested Cormorant flying close to its surface. We then realized that we too were being watched, and suspiciously, by a security person in a white vehicle which had appeared at the other end of the wharf. Despite his scrutiny, Betsy was not phased and impressed us (and hopefully him) with her driving skill as she backed quickly and accurately down the narrow wharf, and right past him without turning a hair!

For our final stop on the way home we decided to return to the St-Lazare sand pits, in the hope of hearing a Whip-poor-will and maybe an owl or other night bird before the 24-hour period allowed for our Birdathon was up. However, when we got there we were almost deafened by the noise generated by what must have been a vast number of GreyTree Frogs; it was all around us and the volume was quite incredible. At the end of this report there is a **YouTube link** to hear how they sounded - only ours were even LOUDER! We despaired of hearing anything else at all, but in the end by concentrating hard we were able to tease out of the cacophony the nasal “peent, peent, peent” of an American Woodcock and then through the fast-failing light to see part of its rapidly descending aerial display.

There may have been many owls, and they may have been hooting really loudly, but we certainly couldn't hear any thanks to our amorous army of frogs! Fortunately, however, the sound of the Whip-poor-will is unmistakable as it repeatedly calls out its own name, so that one was able to make itself heard despite the background clutter of noise. Shortly before the cut-off time, we all did manage to hear it. As by now darkness had fallen and we were pretty tired, and the Whip-poor-will had brought our bird species total up to a more than respectable 120, we decided to call it a night at around 8:45 p.m. Our pre-Birdathon doubts and worries had proved unfounded - what a great day it had been after all!

Grey Tree Frog Mating Chorus: <http://youtu.be/xR0goDTpIF8>

**LIST OF THE 120 SPECIES SEEN DURING THE 2013 BIRDATHON**

Common Loon	Yellow-shafted Flicker
Pie-billed Grebe	Great Crested Flycatcher
Double-crested Cormorant	Eastern Kingbird
Wood Duck	Eastern Phoebe
Mallard (plus ducklings)	Eastern Wood-Pewee
Canada Goose	Least Flycatcher
American Wigeon	Alder Flycatcher
Northern Shoveler	Warbling Vireo
Ruddy Duck	Red-eyed Vireo
Redhead	Blue-headed Vireo
Snow Goose	Philadelphia Vireo
American Green-winged Teal	American Crow
American Black Duck	Blue Jay
Gadwall	Common Raven
Blue-winged Teal	Horned Lark
Green Heron	Barn Swallow
American Bittern	Tree Swallow
Great Blue Heron	Cliff Swallow
American Coot	Bank Swallow
Common Gallinule	Chimney Swift
Whip-poor-will	Purple Martin
Common Nighthawk	Black-capped Chickadee
Sharp-shinned Hawk	White-breasted Nuthatch
Turkey Vulture	Winter Wren
Osprey	House Wren
Bald Eagle	Marsh Wren
Ring-billed Gull	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Common Tern	Hermit Thrush
Spotted Sandpiper	American Robin
Dunlin	Wood Thrush
Killdeer	Eastern Bluebird
Solitary Sandpiper	Veery
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Gray Catbird
Upland Sandpiper	Brown Thrasher
Black-bellied Plover	Cedar Waxwing
Wilson's Phalarope	American Pipit
Greater Yellowlegs	European Starling
Semipalmated Plover	Northern Parula
American Woodcock	Yellow Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	Common Yellowthroat
Rock Pigeon	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Mourning Dove	Ovenbird
Wild Turkey	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Downy Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Hairy Woodpecker	Black-throated Green Warbler
Pileated Woodpecker	American Redstart

Northern Waterthrush  
Tennessee Warbler  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Magnolia Warbler  
Canada Warbler  
Nashville Warbler  
Bay-breasted Warbler  
Mourning Warbler  
Indigo Bunting  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Northern Cardinal  
Scarlet Tanager  
Song Sparrow  
Savannah Sparrow

Chipping Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
Field Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Common Grackle  
Baltimore Oriole  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Bobolink  
American Goldfinch  
Purple Finch  
House Sparrow

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