

still had plenty more birds to see. John pulled out the Brewer's Blackbirds which we heard had been lingering along a roadside all spring. We could not find either the Hudsonian Godwits or the American Black Duck that had been seen there just the day before. The Wilson's Phalarope that had also been seen the day earlier was also gone. The next three hours still proved productive. The two Redheads were just where they were supposed to be, and a lone Sandhill Crane, standing still in a plowed field was a welcome reprieve. The flock of Forster's Terns over Deer Lake, and the Golden-crowned Kinglets singing from the tops of the spruces in Lyons Woods were also valued, although expected, additions. However, the Hairy Woodpecker that flew in front of the van as we were leaving Lyons was a real surprise.

We arrived at Waukegan Beach along Lake Michigan at 7:15 p.m., feeling expectant. We had already broken the record, but thought we could still add a few more birds. Maybe, like last year, we would find a Franklin's Gull, or, like the year before that, a Great Black-backed Gull. We would almost certainly pick up Bonaparte's Gull, a bird we had never missed. There were also shorebirds to be had. After all, Waukegan Beach was about the best place in the state for Piping Plover, not to mention Black-bellied Plover or Red Knot. The wind was picking up, and it was cold. Most of the gulls that had been seen the week before on the Spring Bird Count were gone, and all that was left were a smattering of Ring-billed and Herring; the only sandpipers were Sanderlings and turnstones. After 45 five minutes of shivering, we decided we had had enough of this.

As we walked back to the car, someone spotting something over the road. There, flying over the parking lot, was a Common Loon.

After debating whether or not to run up to Zion Harbor to look for Bonaparte's Gull, we decided instead to try our luck at the local Kentucky Fried Chicken. After dinner we would head over to Zion Marsh and listen for Common Snipe, Least Bittern, and King Rail.

By the time we had finished eating and walked out to the end of the road through Zion Marsh it was dark, and we were all exhausted. The wind continued to blow, and it suddenly felt much like it had so many hours earlier, standing in the middle of the night at the marsh at Iroquois. It was the same wind, the same cold, and the same birdless silence. After 22 hours, 412 miles, 24 bagel sandwiches, and 184 birds, we were ready to call it a day.

Is 184 beatable? I think so. 190 even seems a reasonable goal. If we could nail down a few more of the southerners, finally figure out how to get a Least Bittern, and get lucky with

a few more gulls and shorebirds, I think we could do it with our existing route. Would we try again? I had vowed that after we broke the record I would call it quits. I was getting tired of spending my spring weekends driving around scouting for flooded fields, rather than looking at warblers in the lake front parks. I was tired of thinking about new and improved routes, and the advantage of taking this road rather than that. I was tired of spending the evenings before the count waiting up for every weather report, and getting anxious with every rumor of rain or hint of winds from the wrong direction.

A couple of weeks ago I was talking to John. I mentioned that I had seen a posting on IBET, the Illinois Internet birding discussion group, of a new place in Lake County to view spring shorebirds. I told him that I had printed it out, in case it might come in handy if we decided to do another big day next year. He had already done the same thing. So who knows? Maybe next spring we will be back at it. Maybe next spring, 190!

Author's Note:

People have often told me that our team is too big. I like to think of our team as including even more than the six of us. Our success this year is really owed to a number of people who have provided us with information and encouragement over the last five years. Joel Greenberg has always filled us in with the latest Lake County spring count reports. David Johnson has also provided us with great tips. Every year Richard Biss has called the evening before the big day to let us know if anything new has been called in to the Chicago hotline. Many others have also provided invaluable assistance. A special debt is also owed to Andy Sigler, who has provided us with more worthwhile advice and information than he will ever acknowledge.

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