

I reminded Dave and Renee that we hadn't got Indigo Bunting yet, so we listened for its singing, and got that one, too. Dave also found a very strange-looking bird that turned out to be a Black-billed Cuckoo.

By this time, it was nearly sunset and we still didn't have a Field Sparrow. "I know where we can get one," said Dave. Renee drove through the grueling Buffalo Grove traffic to Buffalo Grove Forest Preserve; we hopped out of the car to listen for the bouncing ping pong ball, heard it, checked it off, and sped on over to Almond Marsh where a Ring-necked Duck was supposed to be hanging out. In the near darkness, Renee not only found the ring-neck, but also a pair of Ruddy Ducks. We were laughing like school kids as we got back into the cars. "I can't believe it. Ruddy Ducks," Renee kept saying.

Then we were off to our final trek (well, penultimate trek — there was the little matter we had to settle with the Barred Owl before midnight.)

Final hours

Nine p.m.—ish, we arrived at Route 173 in Zion near Illinois Beach State Park and walked the long old concrete path toward the lake with our tapes. This is my absolutely favorite part of Lake County Big Day. It was calm, clear, silent. One by one we played the tapes. Whip-poor-will. King Rail. Virginia Rail. Least Bittern. They all responded. Snipes winnowed. Woodcocks peented. Last year we missed the King Rail and Least Bittern and three of us didn't hear the Whip-poor-will. But this time, we heard everything loudly and clearly. The Virginia Rails, in fact, clucked across the marshes for several minutes after we had played the tape. It was nearly too much to believe — that we had the honor of ending our day with some of the rarest Lake County birds.

But we weren't done yet. It was a good half hour back to Wright Woods. We had our 162 species, we broke the record from last year's 158. But we

wanted that owl! We could taste that owl! So we went. We played the tape. And it called right back at us. 163 species. 11 p.m. We might have even had time to dig up a moorhen tape and play it somewhere and get 164. But it seemed only fitting to end the day with the Barred Owl.

We also missed Belted Kingfisher. And we should have gotten at least one unusual gull. And we missed Vesper Sparrow even though we knew they were there.

But can we produce another Piping Plover and all those shorebirds and late migrating ducks next year? Will the Pileated Woodpecker be there waiting for us? How far can the IOS Reds go? All I can say is this — no way will I ever attempt to do what the Illinois Big Day birders did (see separate story). If anyone knows Illinois and birding, it's those guys! Hope they don't decide to do a Lake County Big Day next year.

—Sheryl De Vore
967 Braeburn Road
Mundelein, IL 60060



*Verily, verily says the hermit thrush,
as the long light slants through the naves and aisles of the wood.
Over and over the mourning dove,
calling on long summer Sundays when the church bells toll,
says that all you ever believed, when you promised love to a mate, is true;
all you dreamed that your child would be, is true.
And the right comes true.
And the song comes true.
Truth on the air, these days, is not too common:
we have sown the ether with rumor and propaganda,
and every hour there is some new alarm or excursion into folly.
But, as Nature softens nothing, so it tells no lies.
The birds bear unshaken witness.
Their song is changeless, from age to age.*

—Donald Culcross Peattie, "A Cup of Sky"
The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1945