

Shrike Force finds Loudoun County's first recorded Black-necked Stilts and More!

Pat Whittle joined Mary Ann Good and Joe Coleman for Shrike Force's 21st Birdathon. For the first time in years, we had consistently beautiful weather with comfortable temperatures, lots of sunshine, and no rain! That made an incredible difference not only in the number of birds we observed, but also in how much fun our 48 hours of birding was! The birds seemed to agree by singing and announcing their presence regardless of the location or the time of day..

At our first stop, Meadowbrook Farm Ponds in Leesburg on May 7, we were astounded to find 2 **Black--necked Stilts**, a species which had not been previously recorded in Loudoun County. We immediately got the word out to the birding community and even before we left for our next stop, several birders had arrived to see this rarity! We couldn't believe we were starting our 48 hours of birding with such a unique sighting. Others, including Bryan Henson who took these photos, couldn't believe our luck.





After leaving the Meadowbrook Ponds, at Pat's suggestion we visited Ball's Bluff where, in spite of the hour, 12:30 pm, a number of birds were still singing, among them 8 different warbler species (including a Yellow-throated Warbler, a warbler we rarely find). We definitely plan to add Ball's Bluff to our future Birdathons.

In all we found **111 species** in locations which varied from the Algonkian Regional Park (57 species, one of which was a rare **Lincoln's Sparrow**), Appalachian Trail Road (37 species), Sweet Run State Park (61 species), to the area around my home in western Loudoun County near Bluemont (59 species), and a number of locations in between those.

We were excited to find:

- an adult Trumpeter Swan sitting on its nest and, in my neighborhood, this young Trumpeter Swan:



by P. Whittle

- 7 shorebird species
- 6 woodpecker species

- 2 different kinds of falcons, including this **Peregrine Falcon** sitting on its cliffside nest in Maryland (seen from the McKimney Boat Ramp on the Potomac River where Rte 15 crosses into Maryland):



by P. Whittle

- 9 sparrow species including both a rare Lincoln's Sparrow and this uncommon Savannah Sparrow



by P. Whittle

- 18 warbler species, some of which we rarely find such as the Yellow-throated Warbler.

Unfortunately, we couldn't photograph it but Pat did get a photo of this beautiful Northern Yellow Warbler on one of my neighbor's properties:



by P. Whittle

- and 3 Red Fox dens, all with kits, within a 1/2 mile of each other in my neighborhood:



by P. Whittle

Every year we can't believe which bird species we miss. This year we were surprised to miss Prairie Warbler (a bird that was at Banshee Reeks in good numbers on Saturday morning when we were at Algonkian), and Bobolinks which we saw and heard the days right before and after our Birdathon. And we couldn't believe we didn't see a single Red-tailed Hawk. While there are a lot fewer of them in the county than there used to be, not finding a single one was a big disappointment.

Nonetheless, it was delightful to see so much of what is still a beautiful and rich county in spite of the extensive development that has occurred here. At the same time that development brought home to us how important the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy's mission to preserve wildlife habitat is!

To see a complete list of what we found and where, check out this Trip Report (it includes photos on some of the individual checklists):

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/520718>

Joe, Mary Ann, and Pat