

On Monday, May 25, I parked up at the Point, noted that I couldn't see from one side of the lot to the other, and headed out to the waterbird shack. Not surprisingly, I couldn't see much there, either. I took the first weather data of the day. There is this question in our weather protocol that asks you if it's sunrise. The time was 5:55 a.m. Technically, it *was* sunrise, but from inside the pea soup fog, answering "yes" felt a bit of a stretch.

This was a problem: tentatively, we'd decided this day was to be the annual WPBO birdathon. When the purpose of the day is to find as many species of birds as possible, and you cannot see *any* birds, the effort feels hamstrung. My morning was quite dismal, consisting of long birdless stretches punctuated by occasional updates--Chris Neri had driven out to Vermillion. There, he had found *plenty* of winged things. Though this did encompass American Bittern and Red Crossbill, most of these were the wrong sort of winged things: mosquitoes. Nova radioed to say she'd gotten us a House Wren and Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Alec Olivier and I discussed the merits of postponing to a later date with better weather--a risky move, for the odds of a later date with better weather happening while field season was still in operation seemed slim.

But then, news from our birdathon mercenaries began to trickle in. Apparently, not far afield from the Point, it actually was a nice day. Michael and Susan Kielb reported that birds were plentiful around the Tahquamenon Rivermouth. Darrell Lawson found his first Chippewa County Red-headed Woodpecker. Elliot Nelson happened across a rare Loggerhead Shrike near Pickford. At the waterbird count, Lake Superior wasn't even visible until there were just 45 minutes left in the count period. When my count was over, I went up to the hawk deck to powwow with Alec. We decided, at 2PM, we would persist.

Each new bird that afternoon felt victorious. When I swept the beach for shorebirds, I sat down to appreciate a particularly photogenic Sanderling--then looked up just in time to see a line of Whimbrel, 250 strong, rushing right over my head. My phone kept buzzing with updates from Darrell, Elliot, and Kielbs: they too were still finding new species. Alec and I rallied for the night flight, hoping to scoop up some of the many waterbirds I'd missed during my count. We gained White-winged Scoter, Surf Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, and a strong sense of satisfaction, too: when I tallied everyone's efforts, I had to count twice--the number, 166, seemed impossible.

A heartfelt thanks is in order for my fellow field crew, Nova Mackentley, Chris Neri, and Alec Olivier, vital to the planning and execution of Birdathon, and also to this season as a whole. (This extends to Rich Couse, who unfortunately was en route to his next field job during our birdathon.) I also want to highlight our volunteers: Darrell & Kathy Lawson, Elliot Nelson, and Michael & Susan Kielb, whose efforts encouraged us to salvage a day that seemed a wash. Thanks is also due to Michigan Audubon for taking our frequent and last-minute adaptations to weather in stride. To all those who have taken birdathon as an opportunity to contribute so our mission-critical work is perpetuated, thank you. Your support has been even more poignant during a season fraught with uncertainties, and we appreciate you.

--Alison Vilag, WPBO Waterbird Counter