

The Secretary Birds 2018 Great Wisconsin Birdathon Report

By Tom Prestby

Mark Korducki, [Quentin Yoerger](#) and I signed free agent [Aaron Haycraft](#) to our team and the four of us ran our big day this past Wednesday, May 23, with roughly the same route we have run the previous two years. Although it didn't seem like a "good" migration day, we were very pleased to end up with 195 species.

We began under the bright moonlight in the Resort Road marsh on the west shore of Green Bay, just north of the city. Virginia Rail, Sora, and American Bittern were heard among other common marshbirds when the clock struck midnight. We frustratingly had to wait until 12:20am to hear a Snipe call that we had heard winnowing until 11:58pm. Moving to the south, we heard a Least Bittern in Peter's Marsh. Our go-to Screech Owl spot in town did not produce but we were able to find one at a backup spot just north of town on the east shore. We tried some owling in southern Door County, where it became weirdly windy which was not in the forecast, and found a Barred but nothing else. This is one of the holes in our route, there have to be Saw-whet and Long-eared Owls somewhere up there but we have failed to find them so far.

The first twinkle of twilight found us hitting the grassland/hayfields and cedar scrub of Door County between Bailey's Harbor and Egg Harbor where the dawn chorus transferred from Whip-poor-wills and Woodcock to Grasshopper, Vesper, and Clay-colored Sparrow, as well as Upland Sandpiper, Towhee, Thrasher, Raven, and more. A quick check of a woodland picked up a Hermit Thrush and a quick check of Kangaroo Lake picked up Green Heron. Bailey's Harbor (Anclam Rd) produced a wonderful bonus in the form of 2 Black Scoters, 2 White-winged Scoters, and 2 Bufflehead. Some Long-tailed Ducks were seen as well in their brown breeding plumage. We continued north from here to North Bay through the conifer swamp habitat where we quickly checked off targeted White-throated Sparrow, Winter Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Parula, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Golden-crowned Kinglet, etc. Unfortunately Moonlight Bay was fogged in but North Bay produced hordes of Red-breasted Mergansers and some Greater Scaup.

It was time to head west to Peninsula State Park where we had fantasies of the passerine fallout we experienced last year. First a quick check of Ephraim added Common Mergansers and a flyover Loon. The park was rather quiet, although there were a few migrants present at Weborg Point including Palm, Golden-winged, Blackpoll Warbler that we had to work for. Canada and Wilson's Warblers were rather common. When we left Peninsula a status check revealed 125 species, which was pleasing with how "slow" we thought things had been.

Scouting revealed that the ponds we normally check near Brussels have been tiled and drained, so we deviated to some shorebird ponds near Rosiere. A beautiful Golden Plover that was found during scouting remained as well as some White-rumped Sandpipers, Wilson's Phalaropes, other peeps, and a surprise Pipit.

We continued south down the east bay shore with a few quick stops, the best being the swamp at Point Comfort Road where there are several Titmice on territory (a possibly new breeding bird to the region) and Red-headed Woodpeckers. We missed the Merlin I had seen during scouting but found some migrants including a Mourning Warbler. Continuing south, a scouted White-crowned Sparrow remained at a bird feeder and the nesting Peregrine Falcons were sitting on the UWGB Library.

Next stop was Bay Beach which was warm and slow but rather productive considering. Number one on our target list was the Prothonotary Warbler which is apparently on territory near the Observation Building and we heard it immediately. This is another possible exciting new regional breeding record. Highlights of our walk included Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and a late Ruby-crowned Kinglet, as well as a Cooper's Hawk on a nest.

After a couple stops in the southern end of the bay didn't produce much new in the way of shorebirds but did add some common waterbirds such as Yellow-headed Blackbird and Common Gallinule, we made a quick

detour to the former Van Ess sod farm, which still hosts a small colony of Brewer's Blackbirds that we instantly spotted.

Manitowoc was up next and we again had dreams of last year, where a bounty of uncommon gulls awaited us. Unfortunately it was the complete opposite this year, in fact a colossal bust. We could not find any new gulls or shorebirds and our only add was Blue-winged Teal. We will always wonder what would have been if we had gone to Sheboygan or try some other flooded fields off our route instead, but such is birding!

With our heads hanging low, it was time to recollect ourselves as we entered the North Kettle Moraine State Forest. There was almost no wind but it was sunny and warm and originally dead. However, beginning with a singing Hooded Warbler, things changed instantly and we caught fire, finding all of our targeted birds working north to south including Blue-winged Warbler, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sapsucker, Veery, the Chat that is on territory at Long Lake, Henslow's Sparrow and Harrier at Jersey Flats, and Acadian Flycatcher nearby. This is by far the best late-afternoon birding we have had on this route and boosted our spirits heading to Horicon.

We knew we had our work cut out for us at Horicon after the very lukewarm reports from this spring but were pleased to find our first dowitchers of the day, Wilson's Phalaropes, and a decent mix of peeps with the common Black-necked Stilts. Trumpeter Swans were in their normal spot on 49 and we were able to find the Whooping Crane way in the distance. The CTY I pond did not have any new shorebirds or ducks, we never did find a GW Teal or Pintail, both of which had been there within the previous two days. On the way out the Eurasian-collared Dove flew over our car and we headed back to 49 to see what we could spot before dark. A flock of Mallards that took off out of the marsh had a surprise Black Duck with them, which was #193 and broke our previous record of 192. Knowing that 200 was not in reach, we strategized for how we could add a couple more with the minimal daylight we had left. We decided to go to the overlook at the Bud Cook hiking trails, where we saw one of our targets, a Pheasant in the trail. No Dickcissels had arrived on territory yet but in the dusk chorus two Black-billed Cuckoos began calling, #195 on the day. We tried for Great-horned Owl but could not hear any hooting so settled for our record total of 195.

This is the third year in a row we finished in the low to mid 190's on this route, and we have done it entirely different ways each year. This increases our hopes that one of these years everything will come together and we will break the 200 barrier. We cleaned up on northern and southern species on territory and scraped up a respectable warbler total (24 species), but were hurt by lower than normal shorebird totals. Not to dwell on the negative but since it's always asked and a fun thing to mention, our "easiest" misses were Great Horned Owl, Sanderling, Bay-breasted and Orange-crowned Warbler, and Green-winged Teal.

Also, I'd like to thank those who provided us with some local scouting intel, especially Jeff Baughman, Matt Herzmann, and Bob Domagalski.

Congrats if you made it this far, we had a very enjoyable day and are looking forward to next year!!