



Wyncote Audubon Society

1212 Edgehill Road
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wyncoteaudubon.org

2020 Birdathon Report Celebrating the joys of birdwatching!

Dear Wyncote Audubon Society members and friends,

Wyncote Audubon's Swifts Team enjoyed beautiful weather and beautiful birds during this year's Birdathon. From 5 p.m. Friday, May 1st, through 5 p.m. Saturday May 2nd, team members visited more than twelve sites in Philadelphia, Montgomery and Bucks counties. By compiling our individual lists, we officially recorded 94 bird species. The Swifts placed second in a field of seven travelling teams. We had six team members. The winning team, who recorded 108 species, had 12 members – just saying – so not too shabby for the Swifts. After combining accumulated results from all teams, Wissahickon Trails Birdathon Leader Kristy Morley reported a grand total of 127 species observed.

During the four hours I was at Carpenter's Woods, one highlight was hearing and briefly seeing a Barred Owl. In addition to the familiar who-cooks-for-you call, the bird also gave some very strange sounds I'd never heard before - all of this around 6 AM. Two birds have been present in the woods so perhaps it was a vocalization associated with mating.

I flushed a Pileated Woodpecker from a log on the ground and the bird then flew to a telephone pole along the edge of the woods and just sat there while I walked by right under it. Don't think I've ever gotten that close to a Pileated before.

Keith Russell

Wyncote Audubon members and friends were also out and about, adding their observation and experiences to our celebration of birds. Here are some highlights:

Notes from Jennifer Sherwood: Janet and I kicked off the Birdathon Friday evening with rainbows at Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve and Fort Washington SP (Militia Hill).

Other birders had the same idea, so we all wore our masks, as did some of the birds, including this Common Yellow Throat.

Birding with a buddy (at a safe social distance) made the event even more fun. Janet and I weren't the only birders out together.





Martin Selzer and friends tipped us off to a few good birds at the Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust (PERT), including a Scarlet Tanager (at left), whose scratchy song was first heard alongside Creek Road Trail.

The strangest and funniest vocalization we heard during the day was a mom shrieking at a vole when it ran under her baby stroller!

My favorite sighting had to be a Great Horned Owllet at PERT... awwww... awesome!



A highlight for me was the very close observation I had of an Ovenbird on a side trail at Peace Valley Park. It was foraging immediately adjacent to the foot path and came within 6 feet of my location while I “froze” to observe it walking on the forest floor — no need for binoculars.

The other highlight was from the Birders who were congregating (with masks and appropriate social distancing) on the Chapman Road Bridge. They had all come, as well as me, to see if the three Red-necked Phalaropes, that had been observed and photographed on Friday afternoon, would still be around. Their excitement was palpable despite the fact the birds did not show up on Saturday morning.

Leigh Altadonna

Notes from Janet Starwood: I love to see birds “up close and personal.” Jenn and I had several species that indulged us with long views at close range, including a beautiful view of the Black-throated Blue Warbler singing in the shrubs along Creek Road and a memorable close-up of an Ovenbird scratching in the underbrush. In my experience, these birds are often heard singing teacher-teacher from wooded hillsides, but rarely seen close-by.

Another highlight was seeing a Blue-winged Warbler foraging along Creek Road. Jenn managed to nab a photo (at right) of this rapidly moving bright yellow blur, who occasionally paused just long enough out in the open to give us some wonderful views.



It was great to see one of the smallest nests of resident birds, the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher’s nest in the Perley Sanctuary in Wyncote, and one of the the largest local nests, assembled by the American Bald Eagles near PERT. It’s also great to bird with a terrific species spotter, song identifier, and talented photographer like Jennifer Sherwood!



As in recent years, we were thrilled to see a Red-Shouldered Hawk nesting near the Four Mills Barn, headquarters of Wissahickon Trails on Morris Road. It's good to see this spectacular bird back again. She was feeding her young on Friday evening. (Jenn's photo is at left.)

On my way home from Fort Washington State Park, I was very happy to observe a male Cooper's Hawk by the Perley Sanctuary in Wyncote. He appears to have a romantic relationship with a local female Cooper's Hawk. They are often seen together, clucking and chortling affectionately with each other.

Every year there's the frustration of not seeing some species - the "birds that got away." This year, no Kingfishers were observed during the official Birdathon time frame (although a pair of Kingfishers was seen rattling through the Perley Sanctuary on Sunday). The usually reliable Turkeys refused to show up on time at PERT (they were strutting about the day before and the day after, of course).

However, there is always the pleasure of an unexpected appearance - such as seeing a pair of Blue-winged Teals (Jenn's photo below) at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve.



At the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, the Orchard Oriole and the Baltimore Oriole were in the same tree on Saturday. Several Northern Waterthrushes were seen in three different locations on the refuge.

Barb Thorp

Notes from WAS members Jean Brady and Nilesh Shah: Besides birding from our sun room in the morning, our effort was focused on just one location - Norristown Farm Park. We did a 4.0 mile loop in the park from just after noon to almost 3 PM. We saw 25 species in total. Here are some highlights:

The Tree Swallows were out in number, and some were nesting in the bird boxes in the property. We came upon two pairs of Yellow-rumped Warblers that allowed close up observation. The male plumage was spectacular. Along with them, we saw a Palm Warbler, also in prime breeding plumage. We saw our first Brown Thrasher of the year, and we listened to it for a while, while it mimicked a whole range of borrowed songs.

A pair of Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers had built a nest in the crook of a branch, about 15 feet above the trail. We observed both birds alternately visit the cup-shaped nest, adding matter to it, and nudging it into place.

We had the pleasure of observing a House Wren building its nest in a bird box. We were close enough to be able to see it do its job without any binoculars. It was so single-minded that it barely acknowledged our presence and was not spooked at all by the passing cars.

Carolina Wrens were heard in multiple places, but we caught sight of one singing over a bird box, right next to the box occupied by the House Wren. The Carolina Wren stood on top of the bird box as if it had placed dibs on it. (Conveniently for the Carolina Wren, the box was already marked with a Do Not Disturb sign.)



Notes and photos from Judy Stepanaskie:



For me, highlights of this year's Birdathon included getting good looks at several Northern Waterthrushes at the John Heinz NWR at Tinicum, along with seeing a Brown Thrasher singing out on a treetop, and a very nice look at a late appearing Hermit Thrush.

I was birding with Dave Sharp. We enjoyed a lunch break at the Mt. Airy Mansion in Fairmount Park, where a Northern Flicker was peeking out of a hole in a dead tree.

When I got home after the official end of the bird count, at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak was at my feeder, and my hummer was back. It was great end to a good day.

Judy Stepanaskie

Wyncote Audubon members are invited to share their species lists and birding experiences by sending their notes to wyncoteaudubonsociety@gmail.com. We hope to update this report with additional species observations made during the 24-hour Birdathon time frame (5/1, 5 p.m. to 5/2, 5 p.m.).

We deeply appreciate your support for Wyncote Audubon Society and your commitment to sharing the joys of birding with your families, friends, and the next generation of birders!



While some bird species eluded the Swifts Team this year, we had great experiences with the birds that did show up, including some shore birds at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve and at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum.

At left, Judy's photo of a Caspian Tern at the Refuge.

We also had some challenging experiences with birds that flew off before they could be identified and other mystery birds, including the mystery bird challenge from one of Judy's photos, at right.

Judy's photo of the Barred Owl in Carpenter's Woods is below.



With many best wishes for good birding (and safe social distancing),

The Wyncote Audubon Birdathon Swifts:

Leigh Altadonna, Keith Russell, Jennifer Sherwood, Janet Starwood, Judy Stepanaskie and Barb Thorp

With thanks to Nilesh Shah and Jean Brady for adding their notes and photo to this report

