

Howard County, Maryland

May 15, 2010, Twelfth Unofficial Big Day

Joanne Solem

Leaders: Bonnie Ott, Ralph Cullison, and David Cummings. Recorder: Joe Hanfman. Total participants: 7. Emmalyn Holdridge, Nancy Magnusson, Joanne Solem. Weather: Mostly sunny, high in 70s, breezy in p.m.—a beautiful day! Time: 5:45 a.m. – 8:30 p.m. Total species: 112. Meeting site: High's at MD 144/32, then carpooled to West Friendship Park. Notable species: 18 warbler species total. Gray-cheeked Thrush and Bay-breasted Warbler - West Friendship Park; Veery – Henryton; Wild Turkey, Black-billed Cuckoo, Broad-winged Hawk – Marriottsville (no Yellow-throated Warbler); Alder Flycatcher and Least Flycatcher – Alpha Ridge Landfill; American Bittern (2), Wilson's Snipe, Swamp Sparrow, no rails — UMDCF; Blue-winged Teal, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Bald Eagle (only one) — Wilde Lake; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron — Lake Elkhorn; Cooper's Hawk (carrying a chipmunk), Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest over the river (already had the species), and a Least Flycatcher (second of the day) — Eden Brook, Gorman Stream Valley Natural Resource Area.

Sampled some Big Day sites for the first time. We tried meeting at West Friendship Park to take advantage of dawn sun on deciduous trees. That proved to be a great idea. After that start, the group worked along the Patapsco River adding a brief stop at the Hugg-Thomas Wildlife Management Area parking lot, and then followed River Road alongside the Patapsco east of MD 32. Prior to the landfill, vehicles were moved to Alpha Ridge Park. The landfill held a couple of surprises with both Alder Flycatcher (first pond, Bonnie heard it initially) and Least Flycatcher (along the fence line adjoining Alpha Ridge Park). From there we continued to the UMDCF which, as usual, provided a nice array of additions despite no rails. Two American Bitterns were flushed at different locations along the swale. We then moved on to the central lakes. Wilde Lake was an especially productive stop with the usual Black-crowned Night-Heron, but the Blue-winged Teal was the choice addition, and we finally added the day's only Bald Eagle. Lake Elkhorn added a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Both night-herons on a Big Day was a noteworthy event! A walk on the old road at Eden Brook to the Middle Patuxent River would have been especially eventful if we hadn't already had a Least Flycatcher. Two in one day was also a first for unofficial Big Days. We settled for a Cooper's Hawk and, finally, a hummingbird nest over the river. From there, the group swung past Fulton Pond (nothing new) and made a brief stop at Brown's Bridge (nothing) before heading to Alpha Ridge Park to pick up cars before the gates closed. The last stop was at Bon Secours Spiritual Center to add Prairie Warbler. A minor disappointment was that an excellent sky and a lovely evening did not produce a single nighthawk.

Everyone was tired, but there was a reluctance to stop. Despite not setting any records, the combination of lovely weather and more than the usual number of special birds produced a consensus that the day had been "one of the best Big Days ever."