

Howard County, Maryland

March 23, 2013 Big Day

Russ Ruffing

At precisely 6:17 a.m. on 3/23/13, we began our March Big Day in Russ' yard with the hopes of tallying 80 or more species. The day started strongly with one of the first birds being a twittering American Woodcock overhead - only the second time Russ has had this species in his yard. We then got a lot of the usual winter species but were happy to tally both Red-breasted Nuthatch and Brown Creeper before leaving for the Conservancy. After a quick stop to check Waverly Pond, we walked across Route 99 into the Conservancy property and promptly picked up an easy-to-miss-on-a-Big-Day American Kestrel. The swale in the large field yielded about a dozen Savannah Sparrows but we could not kick up any meadowlarks anywhere in the field despite Bonnie Ott having them here just a few days prior. We did not get our fill of all the likely sparrows here, including American Tree and White-crowned, both of which were misses for the day.

We then tried Waverly Mansion Pond in vain for Wood Ducks, and Alpha Ridge Park for turkeys and Rusty Blackbirds with no luck. Then it was off to Race Road, which yielded Wood Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, American Black Ducks, Green-winged Teal, Rough-winged Swallows, and an American Coot. The Jessup Gull site was next on our list, and we got there exactly the same time that the whole flock of gulls lifted off the Trash Transfer Station roof and flew into Howard. We had at least two Great Black-backed Gulls here along with a handful of Herrings. It was lucky for us, because the entire lot was full of vehicles and no gulls landed there like they typically do. We also saw a surprise Merlin fly over Dorsey Road on the way to this location.

The GE Retention Pond yielded up nine Lesser Scaup, and then Elkhorn gave us our first Fox Sparrow of the day at the east end. We scooted down to Fulton Pond and got a Wilson's Snipe, our first Bufflehead, and more Green-winged Teal. Brown's Bridge was almost desolate save for a few Ring-necked Ducks, two American Black Ducks, and two geese. From there, it was on to Triadelphia with a brief stop first at Springdale Quarry Pond. Three more coots and a couple Lesser Scaup were all that were present. Triadelphia was underwhelming but did provide ten Double-crested Cormorants and a couple Common Mergansers at the dam. Pigtail and Big Branch were not too birdy, but we did get our only Horned Grebe and Pine Warbler of the day at the latter. Surprisingly, no Bald Eagles at any of the Triadelphia locations.

From there, it was over to Harry's house so he could let his dogs out and we could get our Chipping Sparrow for the day, which we did. Harry's has been a lock for Chippings on all three of our Big Days so far. Centennial was a colossal disappointment - no Great Egret or even a kingfisher - and no new water-dependent birds for the day. We did get Tree Swallows here though. Wilde Lake and Kittimaquindi were no more productive, and with us quickly running out of options for kingfisher, this species looked like a potential miss for the day.

We then made an unplanned stop at Gwynn's Acres Path for Rusty Blackbirds; we didn't see any of those but did get our only Hairy Woodpecker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker for the day here, at the exact same moment. We also tallied a Howard Patterson at this location! At the U of M Farm, we finally got our Bald Eagle for the day, then it was off to Fox Chase where we didn't see much but finally did hear a kingfisher. Whew! Underwood Road was completely dead for larks and pipits, but in a field along Route 99 just west of Route 32, we had 55 Killdeer! We searched the flock in vain for a Northern Lapwing (hah!).

A quick scan of the ball fields at Western Regional also failed to turn up any larks, but luckily at Daisy Road we found both pipits and larks, much to our relief. A late stop (6:30 p.m.) at the Silage Pit on Florence Road revealed at least 40 Song Sparrows but no White-crowns or Rusty Blackbirds. However, on the way out, we had our second Merlin of the day perched in pretty much the exact same branch of a tree as we had it on our January Big Day. Finally, Annapolis Rock had a number of displaying woodcock at dusk but no owls until later when we were standing in the parking lot looking at stars and heard a Barred calling off in the distance.

A nice day totaling 79 birds and 29 stops altogether! Grueling but satisfying!

Big misses on the day included American Wigeon, Ruddy Duck, Great Egret, Eastern Screech and Great-horned Owl, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler (!), White-crowned Sparrow, and meadowlark.

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