

Howard County, Maryland

April 26, 2013 Big Day

Russ Ruffing

At around 5:15 a.m. on April 26th, we (Russ, Harry, and Matt) began our April Big Day in Russ' yard with a target number of 100 species on our minds. We knew we would have to get lucky with some waterfowl, shorebirds, and some decent warbler numbers to get there. The primary targets at Russ' place were Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Red-breasted Nuthatch, which had all been regular at Russ' feeder recently. One of the first birds of the day was a calling Barred Owl off in the distance - the first time we've had any owls to start the day on a 2013 Big Day. It was also our only owl on the day. We got a handful of Purple Finches, but no Siskins or Red-breasted Nuthatch. Thankfully, we picked up a single Red-breasted later in the day. Next, a quick stop at Waverly Pond provided us a continuing American Coot as well as Spotted Sandpiper. The coot was one of a few "water birds" that helped our totals on the day.

Next it was off to the U of M Farm where we quickly added Orchard Oriole, Northern Harrier, Wilson's Snipe, American Kestrel, Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Bobolink, among others. We left here after only about 30 minutes to go to MPEA. While we found a few new birds at MPEA, such as Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole, and Yellow-throated and White-eyed Vireos, overall it was quite a disappointing and unproductive stop. We soon realized that migrants were going to be hard to come by on this day. Also, we later found out that others had a few species - Wild Turkey, Marsh Wren, Sora, and Grasshopper Sparrow - at the Farm later in the morning which we missed. We should have stayed longer at that location!

The next eight stops were all "water stops," including Triadelphia Reservoir, the Columbia lakes, Fulton Pond, and others. Best birds at those locations were a very late female Canvasback plus a single Common Loon at the Reservoir and a small group of Lesser Scaup at Centennial. We also had a second Coot at a pond on Lime Kiln Road, and Lesser Yellowlegs at Fulton Pond. Overall, though, the birding was slow on the lakes. Patapsco at Marriottsville Road next failed to produce a targeted Yellow-throated Warbler but did yield our only Redstart of the day. Patapsco at Henryton turned out to be the best stop of the day, as it yielded Black and White, Black-throated Blue, and Black-throated Green Warblers. On a lark, we re-checked Waverly Pond on the way to the Conservancy and were happy to get our only Green Heron of the day perched in a far willow along the shore.

The Conservancy was our best bet for Prairie Warbler and Meadowlark, but we missed the latter despite combing the fields extensively for one. By now it was late in the day - after 6:00 p.m. - and our only real hope of adding any other passerines was Patapsco at Woodstock Road, but we wisely stopped back at Russ' yard for one last try for Pine Siskin. A single bird turned up immediately on the feeders, rewarding our efforts. We did not expect much in the park at such a late hour - 6:30 p.m. by now - but we easily found two Yellow-throated Warblers and added our only Wood Ducks and a singing Wood Thrush.

Though we missed the 100-species target, we did find 96 species for the day. Our biggest misses included Green-winged Teal, Great-horned Owl, Blue-headed Vireo, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Pine Warbler, a number of other warblers that should have been around by now, and Eastern Meadowlark.

Russ Ruffing, Harry Fink, Matt Rogosky