

Turdus Migratorius

When you set-out to go birding, especially when you are doing a Birdathon where you want to find as many bird species as possible, you look at EVERY bird you see moving – every little rustling in the shrubs, every bird on a telephone or fence wire, every bird flying overhead. And, since you're out, away from your own backyard, you imagine and hope and plan to find birds that you don't have in your residential area, and this constitutes the thrill of birding – spying some colorful warbler, or some fascinating waterfowl, or a daring raptor diving on a rodent. You have your binoculars and/or camera ready – at your fingertips – for the mere hint of a bird, whether it be birdsong, or a blurred “something” speeding past your line of vision.

So, our Birdathon day had arrived, Sunday, June 2, 2019, and we, team Eagle-eyes, were in the truck together by 5:30 a.m. ready to count a LOT of bird species. As we pulled away from my home, we heard a House Sparrow and a Robin singing to get the list started. We picked-up Curt, and then drove down Larry's alley to spy a Merlin near its nest. Very cool start to a long day. We made our way through town and to Grizzly Gulch where we quickly added 25-species of birds. As we arrived at Mount Helena, there was another Robin on a stop sign, singing. Larry mentioned the Latin name, *Turdus Migratorius*, and said he loved that name, “*Turdus*.”

As it turned out, there was a Robin, or “*Turdus*” as we began calling them, catching our eye, or vocalizing in a nearby shrub, at every stop, in every habitat, along our 176.2-mile route for the day. In every instance, one of us, or more, would swing our binoculars, or camera, in that direction hoping to find a new species, only to find an American Robin – a.k.a. *Turdus*.

There were very young Wood Ducks following their Mom at the Fairgrounds Ponds, in addition to Canada Goose goslings nearby as well. Although we never actually saw the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, we could hear it singing in the Gulch as the sun was raising. Adding to the chorus was a Spotted Towhee and a Gray Catbird. A rarer song was heard at Spring Meadow Lake – the Sora rail was vocalizing, with its whinny, close-by.

We saw quite a few Red-tailed Hawks – one time there were two hawks circling on a thermal “together”. Another time a male and a female Red-winged Blackbird pair was flying over the flying Red-tail, and hitting him on the head – “mobbing” the hawk to get him to leave their territory, which includes their nest. We found Calliope Hummingbirds at three different locations, all vigilantly looking for a flying insect of some kind, seeing one and dashing out to grab it!

One curiosity was a Black-capped Chickadee apparently nesting inside a fallen tree limb. One bird that had us reaching for our Birding Field Guides was what turned-out to be a Black-headed Grosbeak FEMALE! None of us had ever seen one before.

Another oddity, that I had not previously witnessed, was Yellow-headed Blackbirds “jumping” up to catch a flying insect of some kind, and then dropping back down to the water's edge. There was obviously some kind of “hatch” going on.

I think my favorite group of birds this year was the waterfowl, as I was able to get some unusual photos of them. And, how appropriate that half of the funds raised this year through Birdathon, go towards a Birding/Photography Blind at the Helena Valley Reservoir, looking out on an area where ducks, loons, grebes, and other birds with webbed feet are known to hang-out. And, where we will one day be able

to view, and perhaps photograph, such beautiful waterfowl without disturbing them. We are in the beginning stages of developing a plan for the blind; construction may begin as early as this fall.

Please make your check payable to: L.C.A.S., and send to me: Janice Miller, 815 11th Ave., Helena, MT 59601

Thank you for your generous support!

Sincerely,

Team Eagle-eyes!

Larry Urban

Curt Larsen

Janice Miller