

Birdathon 2020 – May 26-27

Brother Can You Sparrow Dime Species count – 118

The drive to Freezeout Lake was a wonder of fresh spring green hillsides shot through with Arrowleaf balsamroot. It was overcast and empty. We met Don & Andrea at the refuge headquarters where we found our first bird—a fledged Great Horned Owl in a hedgerow. It seemed pretty quiet around Freezeout, yet we counted nearly fifty species there, including four different grebes, willet, and curlew. By the time we stopped for a bite to eat, the wind was howling—enough to blow the olive oil off the top of the hummus. That's the Freezeout we know and love.

Benton Lake was slow in the afternoon wind. There were Chestnut-collared longspurs, Horned larks, Lazuli bunting, and our only Canvasbacks. We were greeted by a chorus of early evening birdsong at Giant Springs State Park.: Gray catbirds, Goldfinches, and Swainson's thrushes among them. Next stop, Little Prickly Pear Canyon.

We counted all but two of our raptors from I-15. When we exited at Seiben, all of us exclaimed about the spectacular beauty of the interstate between Great Falls and Seiben. A combination of rich greenness, late afternoon light, and fabulous rock formations—like never before. No small feat, since I effuse about that drive almost every year. There were Towhees, Kestrel, and a Lewis's woodpecker which made an appearance as we were about to leave. Just past the tracks on Duffy Lane there were a pair of Sandhill cranes on the left and a few swooping Wilson's snipes on the right. Along the final stretch, a male Bobolink atop a fence post singing his remarkable song. The Duffy Lane trifecta!

We were ready for dinner and so the end of day one.

Wednesday dawned clear and mild. We spent the morning in and around the Helena Valley. We added a Golden eagle, two hummingbirds, and our final sighting at JFK Park in East Helena, a pair of American redstarts. A grand finale.

As always, we treasured every bird—not only for the count but for the fleeting sense of normalcy their presence represents. And we can't help wondering when, or if, we'll see them again. We thank you for your pledge/donation which we will put to good use on behalf of the birds. Please make you check to Last Chance Audubon and mail it to Jo Lace & Brian Shovers at 210 S. California, Helena, MT. 59601.

We are grateful for your support and interest in and care for birds. Have a great summer!

Lace & Shovers and the Stierles (DNA)