

**The Secretary Birds
Big Day Summary 2019
Tom Prestby**

Myself, Mark Korducki, Quentin Yoerger, and Aaron Haycraft ran our big day for the Great Wisconsin Birdathon on May 21. This is always one of our most fun birding days of the year and this year was no different. Before I get into the details, please consider donating to the Birdathon if you have not yet had the chance to do so. The birdathon is currently at 81% of its goal so your donation would still be a huge help. If you enjoy the report below or if it inspires you to get out into the field, please consider directly helping WI bird conservation at this link: <http://wibirdathon.dojiggy.com/secretarybirds>

The cliff notes are that we ended with 193 species from Door County to Horicon Marsh. Although everything didn't come together for 200, we found yet another formula to get into the mid-190's. We know that someday soon everything will come together and we will reach that lofty number.

We began in the marshes on the west shore of lower Green Bay where we picked up the normal rails, Snipe, and Woodcock in the moonlight. The continued rise in water levels has taken away any chance of Yellow Rails in the area. Working up the east shore of Green Bay, we found the Screech Owl at our normal location near UWGB as well as begging young Great Horneds, which we missed last year. I thought I had a clever Mute Swan stakeout that we could get in our headlights but this was a complete bust. Continuing north, we found Barred Owls and were pleased to find a Saw Whet just north of the Duvall Swamp in Kewaunee County. Attempts for Long-ears came up short, as always. I'm yet to be convinced that this species exists in NE WI but I digress.

We took in the dawn chorus in the idle fields, hay fields, and scrub lands near Bailey's Harbor and found all of our targets including Whip-poor-will, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow, Raven, Ruffed Grouse, and many more common species. Bailey's Harbor itself had a surprise Horned Grebe, a loon, and some Long-tailed Ducks. The boreal forest SNA along CTY Q had our expected Golden-crowned Kinglet, Purple Finch, and White-throated Sparrows. Working up North Bay we realized it would be a very good day for warblers. Random flocks had Bay-breasted (another species we missed last year), Golden-winged, and other very desirable migrants. The bay had Red-breasted and Common Mergansers and Moonlight Bay had our only Bufflehead of the day.

It was time to cut west to Peninsula State Park. This stop has been hit or miss for us over the several years of running this route and today was definitely a major hit. We were greeted by a singing Black-throated Blue Warbler which had an Orange-crowned tagging along with it (both of which we missed last year), and several other firsts for the day including a late Ruby-crowned Kinglet. As we worked our way toward Weborg Point, the excellent numbers of warblers continued and we soon had all of the expected warbler migrants except Canada and Connecticut. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Swainson's and GC Thrushes joined the fun as well and it was great to run into birding friends Andrea and Tom. We could have spent all day here, as they smartly were, but we needed to move south.

The exceptionally cold and wet May has left a lot of water in the fields just north and south of Sturgeon Bay. We picked up some common shorebirds, the best being a late Solitary Sandpiper. Wilson's Phalarope and White-rumped Sandpiper were good too. A pair of Pintail was a nice add as well. The Western Meadowlark I found during scouting along C just north of 57 was singing nicely, this is a very hard bird for our eastern route.

Working down the east bay shore, we missed our targeted Titmice at Point Comfort Road but got the targeted Red-headed Woodpeckers at Point au Sable. The UWGB campus produced the expected Orchard Oriole and Peregrine Falcon nice and quickly.

We got to Bay Beach around 11am, which isn't ideal, but when we plan on getting there every year. After dodging huge classes of loud young children, we found a nice stride past the nature center and added 3 (!!) Olive-sided Flycatchers, Canada Warbler, Wood-Pewee (a hard bird on this day with the late migration), Cooper's Hawk, Scarlet Tanager (we were beginning to fear we would miss it as we did a couple years ago), and a couple others. Some spots on Green Bay proper had Common Gallinule and a nice variety of ducks including Black Duck, Wigeon, Canvasback, Goldeneye, both Scaup, and GW Teal but the water is too high for shorebirds- Turnstone was our only worthwhile pickup.

Our quick stop at the almost completely gone Van Ess sod farm produced target Brewers Blackbirds before we even slowed down the car. Another try for the Mute Swan in the daylight was a bust and the Hwy 29 ponds only had common shorebirds, despite the abnormally excellent habitat. A completely random Philadelphia Vireo in a front yard was nice though.

Normally we would go to Manitowoc or Sheboygan next but we decided to cut this from our route because of slow reports in the days prior. The gull flock that has assembled in Sheboygan since then was not there at the time so we made a good call. Something to consider is running our route several days later in the future to make sure this bounty has assembled in one of these lakefront cities.

It was windy by the time we got to the Northern Kettle Moraine State Forest but we were lucky to spot silent male Hooded and Blue-winged Warblers rather quickly. We couldn't find Red-shouldered or Broad-winged Hawks in our normal spots which would end up leaving a hole in our total. Henslow's Sparrows were abnormally quiet at Jersey Flats but we did finally hear one in the wind after a lot of effort. We pulled into our Acadian Flycatcher spot without much hope of finding one due to the late migration (we did not have Willow or Alder either) but were greeted by an Acadian literally hunting in the closest sapling to the parking area.

On our way to Horicon, we were very happy with the day so far but knew we would need a massive shorebird fallout to hit 200 species. We also knew that water at Hwy 49 had come up because of heavy rains just before our Big Day. The shorebird fallout was not to be, in fact our best shorebird, a female Hudsonian Godwit, was in a flooded pasture on 49 just before Waupon. The Jersey Road pond also did not have many shorebirds but did hold our only Hooded Merganser of the day. The marsh did produce nicely with other targets we still needed including Harrier, Whooping Crane, Black-necked Stilt (much harder than normal as others have said but a pair flew in a dusk), Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Trumpeter Swan, and Coot (yes, you read that right, we didn't have one before now). A lingering male Ring-necked Duck in the impoundment just east of the Auto Tour was our best find in the marsh. With wind increasing and rain beginning, our day ended around 8pm with 193 species and no reliable targets to find.

In summary, we did excellent on warblers and lingering ducks, finding all reasonably expected species of each group. Shorebirds were a big letdown and the reason we were not in the upper 190's or at 200. It's always fun to talk about easy misses so ours were our target Hermit Thrush in Door County, the hawks I mentioned in Kettle Moraine, and worst of all, Cedar Waxwing. I've heard of others missing waxwings on Big Days and this year was our turn. Willow and Alder flycatcher and Cuckoos just were not in yet in this late year.

Congrats if you made it this far and again, please consider a donation to bird conservation to get the Birdathon a little closer to its overall fundraising goal. Thanks!

Tom Prestby
Green Bay