

## **The Challengers**

Geoff Holroyd, Pat Crossley, Sarah Trefry, and Hugo Framis

Our 2002 Baillie Birdathon was a fun day of birding with no pressure to set records. Our substitute birder was avid Spanish ornithologist Hugo Framis imported for the event, well almost. Hugo had written looking for a practical volunteer opportunity in Canada. Helen and Phil Trefry seized the opportunity to get extra help for the Birdathon and for their peregrine breeding program, and imported Hugo, just in time for the Birdathon. Our goals for the day were 100 species, lots of life-birds for Hugo and lots of laughs by supper time.

We began at 5 am on our route to Helen and Phil's Upsandowns Farms where we stopped at a few ponds that added over 30 species on our list, including a Pied-billed Grebe by 6am. Rumours of a Rufous Hummingbird at the Trefry feeders held us for a few minutes but Phil promised to watch out for the rare hummer. So we headed north to Islet Lake Staging area for Great-crested Flycatcher - it seemed like a good idea after seeing them their last June, but it was a bust this year. Hugo did spot a Rose-breasted Grosbeak much to his and our delight. So we headed north with 81 species by 10am.

Then we did the obvious and headed to Elk Island National Park. At the annual stop at Tawayik Lake we enjoyed the Avocets nesting on the mud flats. Sharp watching though drooping eyelids failed to see a cinnamon teal. At Astotin Lake we were almost skunked for new species - spring migration was over and no loon in sight. Geoff's imitation did not fool the bittern, nor Hugo. We pulled away after lunch with 92 species at 12:30, way behind last years total at this time, but way ahead on Hugo's life list.

At Stonehouse road, we did hear Sprague's Pipits and Mountain Bluebirds much to our delight. At Mundare Beach the main migration was obviously over but two Snow Geese lingered, as well as a Black-bellied Plover, a Red Knot, a few Sanderling, one peep which Gerry Beyersbergen identified as a Semipalmated Sandpiper on the next day even though he was not there (but he is a great birder to be able to identify the shorebird a day later ☺). As we headed south a Swainson's Hawk allowed us to show Hugo how to tell it from Red-tails. The colony of Cliff Swallows at Amisk Creek left us at 108 species but no Bobolinks at the usual corner.

Determined to foray on to 110 species, we headed to Mom's Ice Cream in Tofield. Why you say, well ice cream is good for your eyesight! No new species until we saw a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Upsandowns. We were one short of our revised goal. Little did we know that Gerry Beyersbergen had identified the Semipalm for us and we were really at 110 species. We achieved our goals, over 100 species, lots of lifers for Hugo, and lots of laughs.

PS: Mammals and Amphibians seen and heard: Wood Bison, Coyote, Richardson's Ground Squirrel, Red Squirrel, Moose with two calves, White-tailed and Mule Deer, Beaver, Muskrat, and Chorus Frog.