2005 Baillie Birdathon

This year’s Birdathon was done on the way to work… in BC! I had to meet Chuck Priestley at the airport at an early hour, so the Birdathon commenced early in the morning. Things were still relatively dark at first, so most of the birding around the house was done by ear. Heard were the calling of a Downy Woodpecker and the drumming of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Also heard were some Black-billed Magpies, American Crows, American Robins, Yellow Warblers, Myrtle Warblers, Savannah Sparrows, Clay-colored Sparrows, LeConte’s Sparrows, Sharp-tailed Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, a Swamp Sparrow, Purple Finches, an American Goldfinch, and Black-capped Chickadees. Not a bad start! (It’s no wonder I refer to my place as the Wellington Bird Observatory.)

On the drive into Edmonton, the occupants of local wetlands and ponds could be discerned in the early morning light. Floating around out on the water were Buffleheads, Lesser Scaup, Green-winged Teals, Ruddy Ducks, Mallards, Redheads, Canvasbacks, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails and a pair of Horned Grebes. Perched on top of fence poles in a pond were a few Black Terns and in the cat-tails were Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. As I moved from wetland to wetland, a Wilson’s Snipe shot across the road away from a shallow pond that had a few American Avocets sweeping the water for their breakfast.

As I approached Edmonton, more light allowed me to see Red-tailed and Swainson’s Hawks sitting on fence poles or up in trees. Further along the way, an American Kestrel sat on top of a shrub waiting patiently waiting for his early morning meal. The odd Northern Harrier was seen hunting the fields on either side of the road.

After entering Edmonton, it wasn’t long until I had spotted or heard House Sparrows, European Starlings and Rock Pigeons, birds that normally cohabit with people. The last species noted before Chuck and I entered the airplane at the airport was a Ring-billed Gull. We were now off to Prince George, British Columbia.

After a few errands in Prince George, we headed out of town towards Chetwynd. Our route would take us from the west side of the Rocky Mountain Range to the east side. Unfortunately, the only interesting sightings along the drive were of a lazy black bear that was munching on roadside...
dandelions, and an immature Bald Eagle. It wasn’t until we were stopped in Chetwynd before more species could be recorded. Our real job would involve a helicopter, so we had to meet the pilot at the airport. From a previous trip, I knew that near the airport we could find Violet-green and Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Rufous Hummingbirds were also seen in the area, but we did not see any this trip.

After the meeting with the pilot, we then drove to the staging area to wait for our pickup. The staging area was a cleared area in the mixed-wood forest near a small stream. Here we gathered some species that were missed back at home: Ruffed Grouse, Cassin’s Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, House Wrens, Tennessee Warblers, Magnolia Warblers, Lincoln’s Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and a Western Tanager. The cleared area was occupied by an old trailer that had long been abandoned. A pair of Barn Swallows had built their nest inside the shelter of the old trailer.

Judging by the number of nests inside the trailer, swallows had been using the old trailer for many years.

Without too much delay, the helicopter arrived to whisk us up to 5400 feet. Our first task of the week was to conduct radar surveillance of the bird migration around and/or over the mountain range on which we would be staying. After setting up camp, and before commencing the radar work, we were paid a visit by a strutting male Blue Grouse. A large cousin of the Ruffed Grouse, this big Blue was in full display and was making his low deep hooting calls. To me it sounded like someone was beating on a distant drum. As the displayed continued, the light slowly diminished and it was time to start the radar and watch birds as little blinking green lights moving across the screen. It was impossible to guess the species of birds making the blips, so it was the end of the Birdathon for the day.

After a morning session of radar work, we then had to walk the ridge of the mountain and determine what
There was still plenty of time left to add the species, so every new species counted! The ridge was relatively narrow and just above tree line. Most of the birds that were recorded were singing in the spruce trees in the valleys on either side of the ridge. Since we were located high above the trees, we could hear birds singing for kilometres. The most numerous species of birds were Golden-crowned Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes, Dark-eyed Juncos and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. During the walks along the ridges, a few other species were recorded: Northern Flickers, Hammond’s Flycatchers, Winter Wrens, Varied Thrushes, Townsend’s Solitaires, Fox Sparrows, Wilson’s Warblers, Pine Grosbeaks and Pine Siskins. Like the animals of Antarctica, it seemed like many of the birds on the ridge had little fear of us humans in their territory. Many curious individuals came in close and allowed us to get great views.

As our bird counts came to an end, so did the 2005 Birdathon. In total, 101 species were recorded (see attached species below). Not the highest total ever recorded, but it was the highest in elevation I have ever done a Birdathon!

Thank you for your interest. If you would like to support my Birdathon efforts with a pledge, please send it to: Jason Duxbury, 146-52512 RR214, Ardrossan, AB, T8E 2H1. Please make cheques out to Baillie Birdathon. You will eventually receive a tax receipt from Bird Studies Canada.

Wildlife biology can take you to some pretty crummy places.... This was not one of them.
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| The Official Canada-Wide Baillie Birdathon Checklist

**Border:** Jason Duxbury and Chuck Priestley  
**Date:** May 27-28 2006

**Location:** Edmonton AB to Chetwynd BC  
**Number of Species:** 101

The Baillie Birdathon is a project of Bird Studies Canada PO. Box 160, Port Rowan, ON, Canada N0E 1M0