

ANoUS Ontario BIG DAY 2011 - 006-2010-05-BD

This Big Day was conducted by the Long Point Bird Observatory (LPBO) Cygnus Crusaders, a group of loyal LPBO supporters with the simple objective of increasing discretionary funding to support the research, education, and training programs of LPBO through Bird Studies Canada's Baillie Birdathon. The crusaders were made up of Christian Friis, John Brett and Stu Mackenzie.

We gathered in Toronto on May 20th 2011 to prepare for what would be an incredible weekend of Ontario birding. We made our way north scouting out as many locations as possible toward our starting point in Algonquin Provincial Park. We arrived in Huntsville late that evening and shacked up for a good night's sleep. The following morning we scrounged up some supplies and made our way toward our favourite haunts. As darkness overtook the park we settled in at the Mew Lake campground for a small feast and short sleep before beginning our Big Day.

We awoke shortly after midnight on May 21st to the call of an Eastern Screech Owl (a rare bird in Algonquin), and shortly thereafter our tents were packed and coffee brewed while a Northern Saw-whet Owl let out some hoots just north of our site. We spent the rest of the night and early morning hours desperately trying to find a Barred Owl, which was much harder than we anticipated. Our daylight birding began on the way to great boreal habitat along the Mizzy Lake Trail. By 4:45 the dawn chorus started to muster and we began to quickly accumulate species. By the time we made it back to the car we had picked up a great assortment of boreal specialties such as **Boreal Chickadee**, **Gray Jay**, and **Black-backed Woodpecker**; a **Connecticut Warbler** sang loudly out from the back of a stunted Black Spruce bog. We weren't quite happy enough with our species total to justify leaving the park, so we made our way to Opeongo Road and found all the expected warblers that we had previously missed: **Black-and-White**, **Northern Waterthrush**, and **Tennessee Warbler**. By 7:45 we had accumulated close to 100 species and it was time to make our way south. On the way out we made a quick stop near Canoe Lake to investigate a fruitless feeder and checked in on a family of **Merlin**.

The drive to the Carden Plain was swift and the visit in Carden even swifter. In less than an hour we tracked down all the expected local specialties which included **Upland Sandpiper**, **Loggerhead Shrike**, **Sedge Wren**, **Golden-winged Warbler**, **Clay-colored** and **Grasshopper sparrow**. Continuing south we observed a lone **Trumpeter Swan** on Reesor Pond off Highway 407 in Markham.

Our next objective was to maximize the amount of time along the Lake Ontario shoreline. This potentially time consuming strategy is risky, but has the potential to be very productive which was certainly the case this time around. A pair of female **Common Eider** floated not far off Shoreacres Park in Burlington, and we found an **Atlantic Brant** at the Tollgate Ponds in Hamilton Harbour. Further down the lake a lingering female **Black Scoter** was the icing on the Lake Ontario cake. Strong easterly winds the week previous likely concentrated vagrants at the western end of Lake Ontario.

The trip from Hamilton to Long Point was horribly unproductive as we struggled to add additional species. At first glance, Townsend sewage lagoon was a bust, but a keen eye and a little patience paid off as we found a male **Eurasian Wigeon**. From Townsend we made our way into Norfolk County and

Long Point Country along the Lake Erie shoreline; Turkey Point – **Red-headed Woodpecker** and **Bald Eagle**, check! Our next goal was a one-stop bonanza at Backus Woods: **Blue-winged, Prothonotary, Cerulean**, and **Hooded warblers**, topped off with a **Yellow-throated Vireo**!

We exploited mainland Norfolk as best we could and with daylight fading decided to visit LPBO's Old Cut Field Station. If we've learned anything over the years it's never to underestimate the power of 10 minutes at Old Cut. Wasting no time we found an **Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Gray-cheeked Thrush**, and hunted vigorously for a **Mourning Warbler** and came up aces!

Now for one final kick at the can for marsh birds. We had planned our trip well, but did not account for one minor detail surrounding the May 24 weekend: fireworks on the beach! The fireworks displays that engulfed the beaches of Long Point seemed to silence any and all Least Bitterns, but we did manage to find a **Common Moorhen**. Our last foray took us back to the mainland in search of **Eastern Whip-poor-will**, which wasn't a problem, and we counted down the minutes searching scrupulously for a Barred or Great-horned owl to no avail. As we settled down in Clear Creek for a final recount and reflection on the day, 194 species was our total, tying the second highest record in Ontario Big Day history!

Twenty-four hours of some of the best Ontario birding in our lifetimes, a few monster misses (where were the cuckoos?), and great friendships made for one memorable day in support of one great institution. Thank you to all of our sponsors who helped us to raise over \$5,000 in support of LPBO. This Big Day is *Anous* contribution 006-2011-05-BD.