



American Redstart by Nandu Dubey

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The Hoot



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IN THIS ISSUE

Brotherly Love

by Matthew Cvetas, ILYB Parent and Editor of *The Hoot*

I can still remember the day my brother declared he'd had enough with me and moved his bed out of our bedroom and into the hallway. It was odd to see his bed out there, not just because there wasn't really room for it in the hallway, but because of the hole it left in our cramped little room. "Heh," I thought, "maybe I could get a desk?" All kidding aside - I don't know that I knew it then, but something I treasured, my brother, was now missing from my life - well, from my bedroom anyway.

While the bed may have stayed in its new location for awhile, the rift didn't last too long and soon we were back at it, doing things brothers do - playing baseball and football together, catching toads, frogs, and snakes (To be honest, he caught most of the snakes!), fishing, swimming, and playing more baseball.

Though we have lived in different cities since I went to college, I never forgot the good times we spent growing up together. In fact, it was because of those times, I asked him to be the best man at my wedding some fourteen years ago this July. Even now, though we don't talk as often as we should, when we do, it seems we pick up right where we left off.

A good relationship with a family member - brother, sister, parent or other - can be a unique and special thing. In my current family role as referee...errr, parent, it's something I constantly try to impress upon my children, not just each time they raise their voices at each other. I'm hoping one day the message gets through to them.

Since I seriously started birding in my adult years, I haven't had the opportunity to take my brother and his son birding with Jake and me. I think they'd like it. My brother recently told me of screech-owls that live in his neighborhood. Sometimes, the owls call right from a tree in his backyard. Who knows? Maybe, he'll be the one to take us birding.

While my brother and I have never officially birded together, the spring issue of *The Hoot* features not one or two, but three sets of brothers who have - Graham and Henry Deese, Eddie and Brett Kasper, and Ethan and Aaron Gyllenhaal. I think you'll enjoy their stories, which were all originally published elsewhere.



Graham and Henry Deese by Jeff Reiter

Bloomington Birding Brothers

Jeff Reiter tells us why the future of birding is in good hands with ILYB members, Graham and Henry Deese.

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Presbyornis by Connor Ross

Birds of Prehistory, Part 2

Presbyornis, Flamingo Duck? Connor Ross continues his avian history lesson with stories of strange birds that existed before man.

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Bloomingtondale Brothers Part of Youth Birding Movement

by Jeff Reiter

I'd arranged to interview the Deese brothers at Mallard Lake. It was near their home in Bloomingtondale, and the name of the place seemed appropriate given the purpose of our meeting.

But while the Mallard is a common species, it is rare indeed to find two teenagers who are nuts about birds and birding. Graham, 17, and Henrey, 14, fit that description. Given the choice of watching warblers or TV, these kids will take the birds every time.

"Nature-deficit disorder" in the Deese household? Not a chance. Their mom, Suzy Deese, home schools Graham and Henrey and a healthy part of their education takes place outdoors. Family vacations generally revolve around nature and birding in particular.

"This is our journey together and it's been a lot of fun," said Suzy, who also finds time for a nursing career with Cadence Health Care.

Home schooling definitely creates more opportunities for birding. When I met with the boys they had recently returned from birding in the Texas hill country. For the record, they spotted a Black-capped Vireo but missed the region's other specialty, the Golden-cheeked Warbler. However, thanks to excellent timing, the trip yielded the rarest bird either boy had ever seen, a Tropical Mockingbird! The mocker, native to southern Mexico, was discovered by other birders before the Deese's arrival and is potentially the first-ever documented in the United States.

Graham and Henrey are fortunate to have an aunt in Houston. Better yet, a birder aunt. She guided them to the rare mockingbird in April (near High Island) and in 2007 took them to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, home of wintering Whooping Cranes. In 2010, the family birded the Rio Grande Valley.

I confess that hearing about these Texas adventures made my binocular fingers twitch. I've still never birded the Lone Star State, a place considered by many to be the hottest U.S. hot spot of all.

Locally, Graham and Henrey go birding once or twice a week. Favorite places, all part of the DuPage County Forest Preserve system, include Mallard Lake, Elsen's Hill, Waterfall Glen and McKee Marsh.

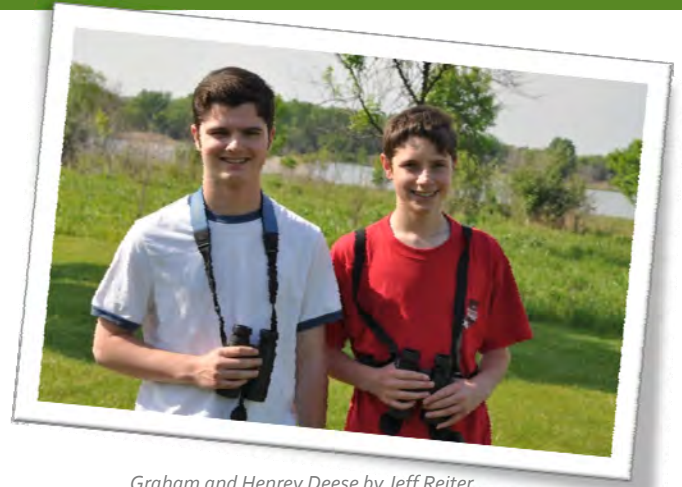
The boys also are active with Illinois Young Birders, a club founded in 2010 by the Illinois Ornithology Society. ILYB conducts adult-supervised field trips all around the state, leading the young members to exceptional birding locations. Graham and Henrey agreed their favorite ILYB trip so far was to downstate Prairie Ridge State Natural Area where they observed state-endangered Greater Prairie Chickens on their mating grounds. (For information about ILYB, visit illinoisyoungbirders.org.)

Additional birding takes place at Willowbrook Wildlife Center in Glen Ellyn, where the boys serve as volunteers. They have a long connection with Willowbrook because of Kevin Luby, a naturalist at the center. Graham says it was nature hike led by Luby at Wayne Grove almost 10 years ago that triggered his interest in birds. The brothers attended monthly walks for the next five years with Luby, who encouraged their newfound passion.

Graham and Henrey began sharing that passion with others in 2009 by leading a family bird walk on International Migratory Bird Day at Willowbrook. They've been helping out at the center ever since, first through its Junior Naturalist program and now its Ambassador program. The latter includes volunteer work and more opportunities to learn from resident naturalists like Luby and Ron Skleney.

"Their bird identification skills are top-notch," Skleney said. "More importantly, they are excellent interpreters and have a knack for sharing their enthusiasm about birds."

They may be the youngest birding guides in DuPage County but that is definitely not held against them. Just the opposite, according to Skleney.



Graham and Henrey Deese by Jeff Reiter

"I asked Graham and Henrey to help lead a series of spring bird walks this year and from the very first walk the participants loved interacting with them. They were a big hit with the Willowbrook birding regulars."

At Mallard Lake I learned that the Deese boys are dedicated to more than just birding. They perform in the West Suburban Home School Band and after our meeting rushed off to a rehearsal for their spring concert. Henrey plays the trumpet and Graham the clarinet.

Their other key activity is Chicago Charge, a speech and debate club for Christian homeschoolers. Through the club, both boys are competing this month in a national tournament in Colorado Springs.

Of course, the Colorado trip will involve some birding. Graham, Henrey and Suzy are heading west early to see if they can find a Lewis's Woodpecker, Lucy's Warbler, MacGillivray's Warbler and other goodies.

Dang, there go my twitchy fingers again. I envy these guys! But mainly I just admire them—for their birding skills, of course, and also for their uncommon maturity.

With any luck, you'll soon meet Graham and Henrey Deese on a local birding trail. They belong to a small but growing fraternity of young birders in the Chicago area who make the hobby even better for all of us.

MORE ON THE AUTHOR

This article originally appeared in the Daily Herald on June 7, 2012.

Jeff Reiter's column appears monthly in the Daily Herald. You can reach him via his blog, Words on Birds (<http://wordsonbirds.blogspot.com/>).

AT THE EAGLE OPTICS STORE



Passing the Test

Eddie and Brett show off their identification skills with Eagle Optics staff.



Future ILYBer

At seven years old, Brett Kasper is an honorary member of the Illinois Young Birders, having attended several ILYB field trips with his brother, Eddie.

CHOOSING OPTICS FOR CHILDREN

6 or 7x

There are a number of things to consider when choosing binoculars for small children. First of all, binoculars should fit the child's hands and face and not be too heavy to handle. In addition, a lower magnification like 6 or 7x offers a wider field of view that will help them find birds more easily and stay with them as they move.

MORE ON THE AUTHOR

This article originally appeared online on June 1, 2012 at the Eagle Optics Blog, <http://www.eagleopticsblog.com>.

Nina Cheney is a staff member and blogger for Eagle Optics in Madison, WI.

Photos by Nina Cheney

Budding Birder Brothers

by Nina Cheney

Watch out, world. If the Kasper brothers of Western Springs, Illinois have anything to do with it, the future of birding is in good hands.

Accompanied by their parents, Ed and Kelly, these two young men visited the Eagle Optics store in June. At first glance, they resembled any ordinary young store visitors. Except, instead of looking bored, (or checking their phones), they were the ones keenly interested in optics. And, the older one, I noted, carried binoculars of his own. Noses pressed against the glass cases, Eddie and Brett searched, absorbed, while their mom explained: they were shopping for a spotting scope.

I brought some scopes out of the case, set them up on tripods, and handed Brett a binocular like his older brother's. Looking out our store window, the boys began to reel off the names of every species of bird they saw. Now, granted, we don't get a huge variety of species outside our store in a business park on the edge of town. But these boys knew every one, knew male from female, and could even differentiate types of finches and sparrows. Oh, and have I mentioned the boys are 7 and 9 years old?

The brothers, who are home schooled, told me they are members of Illinois Young Birders back home in the Chicagoland area. Outside the store, after a few minutes with the Vortex Razor HD spotting scope, 9-year-old Eddie asked about taking photos through it. Glad to oblige, I set up a camera adapter on the Razor for him. Kelly helped with the focus, and before long, 9-year-old Eddie was digiscoping.



Eddie got photos of an American Robin and Brown-headed Cowbird:



Then, 7-year-old Brett snapped one of this Downy Woodpecker:



I was having so much fun with this family. When we came back inside the store, Eddie asked me to ID a recording of a bird song he had heard in their yard in the Chicago suburbs. I deferred to my coworker, Mike, who identified the song as a Gray Catbird. When I told Mike about the boys' bird ID skills, he decided to test them with some photos of birds on his iPod Touch. Mike clicked through 50 photos, and with little hesitation, the boys checked them off with correct answers, one after the other. Each time, Mike's eyebrows rose a little higher. These boys really knew their stuff. They only missed one, which was an immature, but got it right when shown another photo of the same bird. We were duly impressed.

While the boys were being quizzed, Kelly secretly purchased Brett's very first binocular (the Vortex Raptor 6.5x32) and hid it in her bag for his upcoming birthday gift. About a week later, Ed Sr. called and had me ship a binocular to Kelly for Mother's Day.

Keep on birding, Kasper family. You're an inspiration.

Teen Birders Making a Mark in the Field

by Katie Drews

On a recent Friday morning in Oak Park, Ethan and Aaron Gyllenhaal identified more than 30 different kinds of birds, including a few rare warblers, before they even left for school.

"Birds are everywhere," said Aaron, a freshman at Oak Park and River Forest High School. "You just need to look for them."

It takes a special eye, however, to differentiate the thousands of species, which are sometimes distinguished by the faintest markings or slightest size variation. Some are so similar in appearance that their call may be the only determining factor for an ID.

The challenge, though, is what draws the brothers in to the sport of bird watching. And based on their track record, the teens are on their way to becoming experts in the field.

In the last few months alone, Ethan, 17, and Aaron, 15, helped discover two unusual birds in the Chicago area — sightings that drew the attention of media and wildlife specialists from around the world.

Last November they spotted in their backyard a rare hummingbird, which was initially believed to have been a hybrid but DNA tests eventually showed it was a Rufous Hummingbird. Then in April they came across an even more unusual find: A South American flycatcher called an elaenia. (Their friend, Nathan Goldberg, was also a key player in the discovery, which took place in Douglas Park.) The particular species has yet to be determined, but it was considered only the third elaenia recorded north of Mexico.

"That was a very big deal," said Doug Stotz, conservation ecologist at the Field Museum.

"I know birds very well but I probably overlook things," he added. "I assume everything is something common. The Gyllenhaals are always looking for something different."

The Gyllenhaals first got into birding in grade school. Aaron was a first grader who loved to watch trains, so one day when he and his dad were by the tracks, they noticed a huge nest of Monk Parakeets. Aaron wanted to take



Studying Skins at the Field Museum by Katie Drews

one home, and it wasn't long before he ended up with a pet parakeet (from a store).

From then on, Aaron and his brother, with help from their father, Eric, started exploring their backyard for birds and eventually expanded into parks. The boys pored over field guides studying the various species and downloaded files on iTunes to listen to chirps and whistles.

"By seventh grade we were chasing rare birds," said Ethan, a junior at Oak Park and River Forest High School.

They've traveled all over Illinois and taken trips to Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, New Jersey and Colorado in an attempt to catch a glimpse of an unusual bird.

"I was able to drop everything and go — that is, after finding a couple of people who can drive," Aaron said.

Around the Chicago area the boys volunteer as bird monitors and collect data for conservation groups. Occasionally they act as guides and lead groups out on bird-watching expeditions. They are also members of Illinois Young Birders, a group of roughly 30 young bird enthusiasts who take monthly field trips to sites across the state.

"They bring leadership among their peers," said Matthew Cvetas, an adult coordinator for the organization. "Their ability to observe a bird and recognize it is just phenomenal for kids their age."

Of the hundreds of species on their bird lists, Aaron said his favorite is the Blackburnian Warbler.

"It's black and white all over except for the throat, which is the most fiery orange-red color you will ever see," he said. "The contrast is amazing. It's a tiny little bird and it's so beautiful."

Ethan prefers gulls for their complexity, but lately he's also been studying other wildlife, including butterflies and dragonflies.

"They are well-rounded naturalists," Cvetas said. "They not only know birds, they know plants, bugs, trees — just about everything to do with nature."

Ethan would like to pursue a career in a biology-based field and Aaron wants to be an engineer, but no matter what happens, both pledge to continue their exploration of nature.

MORE ON THE AUTHOR

This article originally appeared online on May 29, 2012 at <http://ChicagoWildlifeNews.com>.

Katie Drews writes feature articles for ChicagoWildlifeNews.com.

Hennepin and Hopper Lakes

April 22, 2012

by Matthew Cvetas



On April 22, seven members of the Illinois Young Birders and their families joined field trip leaders, Bob Fisher and Vicky Sroczyński, to explore the wetlands and wooded edges of the Dixon Waterfowl Refuge at Hennepin & Hopper Lakes in Putnam County. For many in the group, this was their first trip to Hennepin & Hopper Lakes.

The members met a steward of the property in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. He explained the history of the area and how it came to be the rich wetlands it is today. After the brief presentation, the young birders climbed the Nolan Observation Tower to look for birds with the thermometer having barely topped 40 degrees and a cold wind out of the north. Somehow, it just didn't seem like spring.



Regardless of the cold weather, it was immediately evident from the tower that although numbers of birds would not be spectacular on this day, species diversity was pretty good.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds sat atop marsh grasses. Bald Eagles and Turkey Vultures

constantly soared overhead. Forster's Terns coursed over the marsh, while Pectoral Sandpipers foraged in the shallow water. American White Pelicans gradually increased over the hours the group spent there.

From the tower, Bob and Vicky led the group to the boat launch where Purple Martins and Barn Swallows glided over the water, catching bugs. Three Pectoral Sandpipers flew in and landed right in front of the group, giving everyone an opportunity to see these shorebirds up close.



After birding around the boat launch, the group shifted its focus toward exploring the levees. Slowly, the sun began to warm things up, but the wind picked up, too, making it more difficult to locate passerines like sparrows hunkered down in the grasses. In one spot at the entrance to the levee road, the young birders picked out a few Vesper Sparrows and a single Clay-colored Sparrow—two less common sparrow species.

From the levee road, the group ventured back into the marsh to look for rails. An American Bittern made a brief flight past the group before disappearing into the marsh grasses. A Virginia Rail called loudly close to the road, but never ventured out into the open. Four Soras, however, foraged right out on the road, allowing all our members to see this secretive marsh bird well.

Shortly after noon, ILYB wrapped up its trip, having tallied 80 species for the day!

Photos by Matthew Cvetas

FIELD TRIPS



Become a Member

Do you have an interest in birds and are between the ages of 9 and 18? Join the Illinois Young Birders and meet other young birders throughout Illinois, attend field trips with other young birders and expert guides, and make lasting friendships with others that share your passion for birding.

Visit our Web site, <http://www.illinoisyoungbirders.org>, and become a member today.



Join Us on Field Trips

The Illinois Young Birders take field trips throughout the year to birding hotspots around the state of Illinois. All members are welcome to attend.

All young birders must complete a permission form at the beginning of each year before they can participate on trips.

Visit our Web site, <http://www.illinoisyoungbirders.org>, for more information.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

July 7th – Birds and Bugs at Volo Bog
Led by Stacy Iwanicki

August 26th – Momence Sod Farms & Wetlands
Led by Sam Burckhardt

September 22nd – Carlyle Pe-Lake-gic
Led by Keith McMullen

Chicago Lakefront Migrants

May 20, 2012

by Matthew Cvetas

Josh Engel and I were led by 8 of Illinois' finest young birders today on our Chicago lakefront field trip. We tallied at least 81 species in total before Jake & I had to call it a day. It may have been a few more.

We spent 4+ hrs at Montrose where we found at least 19 species of warblers and a Brown Thrasher singing throughout our stay. One of the first highlights of the day were two Black-billed Cuckoos that landed out in the open for everyone to see. Throughout the morning, the cuckoos would make several appearances all around the Magic Hedge.

As mentioned, warblers were in good numbers, dominated mostly by American Redstarts, Magnolias, and Wilson's, with just a few of the others represented by more than one or two individuals.

4-6 Mourning Warblers and a few Canadas were about. It was difficult to get a good count of the Mournings let alone see them, but I think most got good looks in the end. About 9am or so, Bob Hughes stopped by to tell us that a Connecticut was singing in The Hedge, but it was silent by the time we arrived. Luckily later, about 11am, while viewing a female Black-throated Blue in a linden, the Connecticut started up again clear as a bell. We were delayed slightly from looking for the bird as a striking Scarlet Tanager flew into a bare tree in front of us. In the end, only Josh and Lucas were able to catch a glimpse of the Connecticut before it disappeared again.



Female warblers provided additional highlights throughout the day. A female Blackburnian made a brief appearance up high. A female Northern Parula foraged in the same spot in The Hedge for most of the day. A female Bay-breasted entertained us in an oak tree for 10 minutes or so allowing for a few good photo opps.



We also spent some time sitting on the ground near a puddle in the woods on the northeast side watching warblers coming in to bathe and drink. While there, we listened to a male Mourning Warbler sing then watched him and a female move in and out of view. Others reported a Louisiana Waterthrush west of the water feature, but we were unable to confirm that.

Tyrant flycatchers as expected were in excellent numbers with several calling Alder, Willow, and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers. I personally didn't tally a Least, but I wouldn't be surprised if someone in our party did. We also had Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher and nine Eastern Kingbirds in the air at once.



At least two Green Herons were flying around early as were calling Caspian Terns. An immature Forster's Tern followed not far behind. Other flocks cruising overhead included Blue Jays and Cedar Waxwings.

On the beach, most saw a Semipalmated Plover and an injured Semipalmated Sandpiper, a few Killdeer and some Spotted Sandpipers. Earlier, a flock of Dunlin and Semipalmated Sandpiper s flew over Josh, Jake, and me as did two female Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Other notable birds on the beach were a Marsh Wren and a rare spring find - a handsome Nelson's Sparrow.



From there, we moved on to Jarvis Bird Sanctuary. It didn't take long to add Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers to our day list as well as House Wren, Veery, and Wood Duck. As the temperatures topped 85 degrees, activity began to slow down and we wrapped things up. All in all, it was a great day on the Chicago lakefront.

Photos by Matthew Cvetas

Owls and Nightjars in Iroquois County

June 9, 2012

by Geoffrey Williamson

I had the pleasure to bird with a fine group of Illinois Young Birders down at the Iroquois County Conservation Area. Our goal was to experience much of the nighttime hooting and hollering that takes place down there. Our field trip started out at 5:00pm, giving us a chance to see the environs during daylight, though we did at that hour feel the high temperatures of the day. Birding around the western perimeter of the property, we tracked down a White-eyed Vireo and a Bell's Vireo, along with a smattering of Vesper Sparrows. A brief walk out into the sedge meadow allowed us to watch a vociferously singing Sedge Wren, while a buck Whitetail Deer with velvety antlers watched us from nearby. The keen eyes among the group were able to spot a bunch of other birds as we stopped in at various points on the property, such as Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Veery. We heard but unfortunately did not see a Summer

Tanager. As the day drew to a close, the black oak savanna was fairly quiet, with activity pretty much confined to some Eastern Wood-Pewees, but the field habitats were active with singing Dickcissels, Field Sparrows, and Common Yellowthroats.



Whip-poor-will by Ethan Gyllenhaal

As we scoped the Dickcissels, the light was fading and the Eastern Whip-poor-wills began to sing. My count at the end of the evening was of 11 Whips; others thought I

was being conservative. We looked for Great Horned Owls coming out to hunt, but didn't find any, though we did spot several bats flitting around. So we turned our attention to tracking down a couple of the

Whips, putting one that was in a tree some 20 yards off the road into a flashlight beam. We also got to see one pirouetting in flight. Our attempts to call out a screech-owl never did succeed, but the reliable Barred Owls began vocalizing. Several of the young birders are getting a head start on rivaling Steve Bailey in calling the Barred Owls! While listening we heard a small pack of Coyotes howling away, The evening ended at 10:30pm with a few of us tracking down one more Whip; one Aaron and Ethan Gyllenhaal photographed.

One disappointing aspect of the evening was the lack of frog and toad calls. The frogs and toads are something I always look forward to at this sight. All we heard was a couple of bullfrogs. Perhaps the dry conditions are responsible for the lack of amphibians there this year. I hope they'll be back.

eBird for Listing and Finding Birds

by Nick Minor, ILYB Member – Age 15



Imagine it's December 29th. You are the Big Year champ from last year but some recent, once-in-a-lifetime weather phenomena have influenced some other low-profile birders to attempt to beat your record, and after they saw how formidable you are, they teamed up. You are curious to know what their lists are at, and you know they both submit their lists to eBird. eBird, you know, is not only handy for organizing and keeping track of your lists, but it also happens to sport a "Top

100 Birders" function, which displays the eBirders with the biggest lists along with their most recent additions for any region. You log in, go to Explore Data, click on the "Top 100" on the right side, set it to the entire ABA Area, and just like that, you can see who is closest to your list's magnitude.

When exploring this handy function, you realize that the team of two is tied with you! You have two days to find as many bird species in North America as you can. Unfortunately, you've made many enemies throughout your journey to the top of the listing hierarchy, so you don't have any friends to call for help. Good thing eBird has another fantastic function within the "Explore Data" menu called "Range and Point Maps", where you can search for sightings of species you've missed this year, but hopefully still have chance of seeing. Unfortunately, nothing you know pops into mind as you've already seen almost every

North American species possible. What to do now?

And of course, eBird has the answer. Back under Explore Data, you click on "Alerts" in the lower right-hand corner. When on the Alerts page, you see ABA Rarities, an alert for Code 3's and above. Perfect! You don't have time to subscribe and wait for an email alert though, so you click view. In Alaska, you see that a Hawfinch, Sky Lark, White-tailed Eagle, Wood Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, and Red-necked Stint have all shown up and have each been sighted on December 28th and 29th. It's a little far, but if you leave soon enough, you might be able to get them all (seven species!!) in a day and a half – putting you way ahead in the race to number 1. Armed with locations, people to talk to, and your PrimaLoft jacket, you hop on a plane and fly up to Alaska that night, much to the dismay of your spouse.

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My Big Day Adventure

by Nathan Goldberg, ILYB Member – Age 16



This spring has been quite amazing in Chicago, and doing a Big Day on one of the best days of migration made it even more outstanding. Back in March, I was invited by my colleagues at the Field Museum to join their team, the Fields' Flickers, on the Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) Birdathon. The team won the competition last year and was trying to defend the title in 2012. The CAS Birdathon is a competition between teams on the third weekend of May within Cook County. This takes place from 12:00 AM to 11:59 PM. Only this year, it took place on the second weekend of May due to NATO being in Chicago the following one.

When participating in a Big Day, at least one team member has to make a schedule of stops and the team has to stick to that. Each stop should have the potential for us to find at least one or two birds that are needed for the list. Once those birds are found, the team should leave immediately and move on to the next stop. Stopping times are very exact, and if one goes over time at one, a stop has to be taken out or shortened later on to stay on schedule.

The 2012 team comprised of me and three other outstanding birders: Nick Block, Jason Weckstein, and John Bates. We birded from 12:30 AM until 10:30 PM, and covered nearly all of the middle and bottom of Cook County. I was picked up very early on Saturday and we went to Binny's Beverage Depot in Lincoln Park for "Minnie the Mockers". We played a short amount of tape and after waiting no more than 15 seconds; we got a response from the Mockingbird. From here, we drove straight to Palos in SW Cook County and were able to find 16 birds by 4:30 AM here. I told my friends about this later, and they were blown away that any birds would be active before dawn. The truth is, birds are always active, but certain species will sing in the night. From Palos, we drove

back to Chicago, and in about 45 minutes we were at Montrose ready for sunrise.

Montrose can really make or break a Big Day since, on a good day, it can hold over 75 species of birds. At times, it can even hold shorebirds that might not be found anywhere else in the county. On our Big Day, Montrose was teeming with birds and we saw 11 species of shorebirds that morning. Some highlights were Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plover, and a bird only Nick and John saw, a Semipalmated Sandpiper. We moved onto the Magic Hedge and warblers were all over. We all were calling birds out, but had to make sure everyone on the team saw each species. On a Big Day, there is a rule that everyone on the team has to see 95% of the birds. We were only allowed about four "dirty birds" or birds that not everyone saw.

After Montrose, we decided to drive to Jarvis Bird Sanctuary. Here, we started on the north side and as we approached the south side, were getting antsy for there were not a lot of birds and we felt as though we were wasting precious time in the morning. But as that thought began creeping into our minds, birds started appearing in numbers. We then found a Grasshopper Sparrow in the middle of the path and many warblers appeared overhead. Some highlights there were Philadelphia Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, and six male Scarlet Tanagers in view at the same time. After we were done at Jarvis, we decided it was time to head back to Palos for some breeding birds.

Palos holds a lot of birds one cannot see in any other places within Cook County. Some examples are Louisiana Waterthrush, Summer Tanager, Bell's Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, and more. Within Palos, we were expecting many of those, but our efforts were futile. We visited many places known to have some of the birds we needed, but none of them were out or showing themselves. Our team thought that perhaps they had not arrived; or that they just did not want to sing for us. We did add a lot of new birds to our list, but we could not get the push of birds we were hoping for. So, after lots of searching, we decided to head back to Chicago to go to Jackson Park for a few species of warblers that had been seen there earlier in the day. Some of those were Prothonotary, Connecticut, and Black-throated Blue Warbler. They had all been

heard singing and seen well earlier, so we thought our chances of finding them were good.

Upon arrival, a male Mourning Warbler greeted us by perching in the open on the railing of the bridge, something one does not see often. We continued to walk to the southern side of Jackson Park and found an Olive-sided Flycatcher perched in the top of a dead tree. We looked for the warblers, but none of them would sing for us. After about an hour and a half, we had to call it quits and headed to SE Cook County at dusk to Bartel Grasslands. Here, we hoped for some birds we missed earlier like Henslow's Sparrow and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Bartel came through with one or two new birds, mainly three Short-billed Dowitchers that we were able to see quite well as they fed. After our visit to Bartel, we headed in the dark to a spot that was known to have Henslow's Sparrows. We walked out in a field and listened, and sure enough, one immediately called for us. From here, we crossed the street to Plum Creek woods to try and catch up with a Barred Owl. We had missed it in Palos that morning, but this was another reliable site for them. After walking about 500 feet into the forest, we listened and after a bit of tape, a family of three responded. It was a beautiful end to a fantastic day.

The final total of the day was 148 species. We won the Birdathon for the second year in a row by two species, while also having a blast. Doing a Big Day was a fantastic experience and I hope to go on another soon.

Birds of Prehistory, Part 2

by Connor Ross, ILYB Member – Age 14



Quick, say 'bird'. What's the first thing that pops up in your mind? A sparrow? Gull? Ostrich? These forms may seem familiar today. We've all seen birds in the wild and in zoos, but before man there were much, much stranger birds that lived.

The Enantiornithes: Conquerors of the Mesozoic

One of the most successful groups of birds that ever existed was the enantiornithes, which colonized the world of the dinosaurs for sixty six million years. If you've ever watched *Walking with Dinosaurs*, then you've most likely seen enantiornithes; the birds attacking the pterosaur (similar to hummingbirds and other birds which will attack hawks if they stray too close to their nests) were enantiornithes known as Iberomesornis. A small (finch-sized) bird, Iberomesornis inhabited what is now Spain nearly 125 million years ago (mya), living near rivers and deltas with oddities such as the dinosaur Pelecanimimus, which can be imagined as a flightless pelican, and the hump-backed Concavenator, a carnivore related to Allosaurus. Known as the "opposite birds", due to the arrangement of the scapula/coracoid bones filled the niches that are inhabited by passerines, sapsuckers and raptors today. We've already talked about one in the first part of *Birds of Prehistory*, known as Avisaurus, which was like a Red-tailed Hawk with a meter-wide wingspan and teeth. A Chinese form, Longipteryx, would have filled the niche the kingfishers occupy today. However, all good things must come to an end, and even though the enantiornithes stormed through five of the world's continents, they went extinct along with non-avian dinosaurs 65mya.

Killer Ducks and Seriemas: Birds Hold Their Grip

The Cenozoic, the age we live in now, is often called the Age of the Mammals, due to the fact mammals were evolving more rapidly and taking over niches the non-avian dinosaurs left. Rhino-like uinatheres and brontotheres filled the niche that non-avian dinosaurs like Triceratops left behind; the cougar-like Patriofelis was the apex mammalian predator. But dinosaurs, in the form of birds, weren't giving up just yet. For 16 million years, a 5-7ft tall bird terrorized North America and Europe. Known as Gastornis, this bird wasn't large enough to take on the uinatheres that inhabited the land at the time, but they were large enough to kill just about anything else in their environments; pygmy horses in North America, anteater cousins in Europe, etc. They faced little competition from mammals, except for the aforementioned Patriofelis and the jackal-sized Arctocyon. And while Gastornis, an anseriforme, died out 40 million years ago and mammals took over, South America wasn't ready for mammals' rule yet.

They came in the form of terror birds. When we went to the Field Museum, a model of one, Andalgalornis, was in the room where we saw the hawk. Terror birds reigned over South America for sixty million years, their rule ending just 2 million years ago. Related to seriemas (cariamias), they were apex predators, most of them nimble and agile, striking down prey with their sharp talons and beaks. Phorusrhacos, a Gastornis-sized terror bird, was anachronistically featured alongside sabertooth cats in *Walking with Beasts*. The largest terror birds were Titanis and Kelenken, 8ft and 10ft tall, respectively. The former actually reached North America and managed to cause terror (no pun intended) for another three million years, running alongside prey at speeds of 65 kph, rivaling that of the ostrich. And then, for unknown reasons (probably niche competition), they all died out, and were replaced by carnivores such as wolves and sabertooth cats.

Pseudodontorns: Pterosaurs Rise Again

Seventy-five million years ago, a large pterosaur known as Pteranodon, soared over Kansas, when it was an interior sea, and dwelled on cliffs, consuming fish. Fifty-five million years later, a similar scene is repeated

and the actors are birds. Known as the pseudodontorns, these birds are known in the fossil record from 58-2mya, with the most famous being Osteodontornis, which lived 20mya in North America. This bird had the second-largest wingspan in avian history, surpassed only by a giant South American vulture (bonus points if you know its name). The pseudodontorns were odd birds, with the largest possessing wingspans of twenty feet. They also had bills lined with false teeth (hence, their group name means 'false tooth birds'), similar to the projections on mergansers' bills. These giant birds would have filled the niche that some pterosaurs held in the Mesozoic era, and the niche albatrosses fill now. When they went extinct 2.5mya, Olduvai stone tools were just being invented.

Samrukia and Gargantuavis: Giant Birds of the Mesozoic

Everyone knows the Mesozoic as the heyday of the non-avian dinosaurs. They reached immense sizes, so big that no other animal could get bigger than a rat when they were alive. But that view is inaccurate. In reality, mammals, birds, and reptiles flourished into various niches and sizes. Badger-sized mammals fed on baby dinosaurs, crocs the size of SUVs walked around on land and terrorized life. And even the birds were getting huge. On the islands of Late Cretaceous France, a bird as tall as man roamed. Possibly related to the patagopterids mentioned in Part 1, it was an herbivore, somewhat like a moa, and its name was Gargantuavis. But this wasn't the only giant bird around, or so it is thought. Very recently discovered, the Kazakh Samrukia was a bird that must have stood 10ft tall. However, its classification is disputed at the moment. Since it is only known from a jawbone, some say it could be a pterosaur and some say it could be an oviraptorosaur dinosaur. Whatever the case is, it was gigantic, and proves that dinosaurs weren't the only big ones around.

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Presbyornis: The Flamingo-Duck

We end this article on a peculiar bird that appeared just three million years after the non-avian dinosaurs were wiped out (and it could have possibly lived alongside the last dinosaurs, if scant fossil remains prove to be from it). Named Presbyornis, it was an early anseriform, which most professional birders would recognize as the order that includes ducks, geese, swans, screamers, and Magpie Geese.



Presbyornis by Connor Ross

While an individual could weigh in at goose-swallow size (14-33lbs), Presbyornis was much more gracile, with longer legs, standing around 3-5ft tall. In fact, it resembled a flamingo with the head of a dabbling duck, feeding on small animals and water plants. Presbyornis proved to be successful design, living for seven million years before dying out.

The author hopes you learned some new bird material from this article.

eBird for Listing and Finding Birds
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When you arrive in Nome, you check recent ABA Rarity sightings on your smartphone, and seeing they've all been sighted, you head

out on the last leg of the adventure that is a Big Year.

If there's anything that this oddly familiar story can teach us, it's that eBird can be instrumental in making you the number one lister in the ABA Area, but also in enriching

your competitive experience, in tracking your lists for you, and in helping you find the birds you want to see with less effort. Above all, the informative value of eBird cannot be overrated, and I'm sure many birders will tell you the same.

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Images of Spring



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Owl by Sage Phillips



Shorebirds by Eddie Kasper

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