



Spirits were high as the North Leeds Birdwatchers set off on their weekly field trip. New fallen snow sparkled in the February sunlight, the temperature was cool, but there was no wind - a perfect day for winter birding. Our leader for the day was Bill Cutfield and we planned to meet him on the way to our destination, the Ivy Lea Bridge. Bill had made a virtual promise that we would find Bald Eagles and Wild Turkeys in the bridge area.

We took our time as we moved south, but found few birds before we reached the meeting point. Because we were late, Bill asked us what we had been doing. "Birding", we replied. To our chagrin, we had only a few birds to report, whereas Bill, while waiting for us, already had a list as long as your arm. Because we needed two cars, Annette joined Bill in his jeep and we continued on our way, spotting Rough-legged Hawks and American Kestrels as we moved along.

We crossed the Ivy Lea Bridge and parked, then we backtracked on foot to the 'eagle place'. There were ducks - close to 500 Common Mergansers and nearly 300 Common Goldeneye - but no eagles. Never mind, Bill knew places nearby where eagles and Wild Turkeys roosted. He even knew where the turkeys fed! To make the story short, the eagle roost was a 'bust', and as for the Wild Turkeys - they just weren't there. Speaking of turkeys, we were beginning to give Bill a good natured razzing - suggesting that there might be one turkey present - the one that brought us there.

I must say in Bill's defence, that it was a

beautiful spot. Snow glistened on the stately pines and all around us was the sound of birds. There were at least 15 woodpeckers, 1 Red-breasted and 15 White-breasted Nuthatches. Chickadees were numerous and many were whistling their captivating spring song. A gorgeous, healthy looking Red Fox darted across the road in front of us, and a mystery bird was seen that never was identified. After all this, Bill offered us a coffee and restroom stop - a suggestion that was well received. These rest periods are always more welcome in winter.

Later, satisfied and happy, we started off again, following our fearless leader. We four couldn't seem to get organized - one mislaying gloves, another binoculars and I kept misplacing my notebook and pencil. We giggled about our ineptness, and the words doddering dodos came to mind. At one stop however, we were pleased to find 6 Roughlegged Hawks in a single field. We were sure that Bill and Annette had missed some of them. When we made our grand announcement, we discovered they had seen 7!! As we followed, Moreen Ready, who is noted for her sharp eyes, saw a different looking hawk on the ground. We stopped. Bill continued on. It took us some time to identify the bird as it was hunched over, eating something and was difficult to see clearly. It was a Northern Harrier. At last we had something that the other party had missed!

However, as we hurried to catch up, we came to four corners. Which way had Bill taken? The lead car is supposed to wait in such situations. We decided to go straight ahead. We were dead wrong! We never did find the lead party. However, we were seeing many Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, and it was a beautiful day. The four dodos decided that, having been left behind, surely

nature would provide them with one unique sighting a sighting that would make Bill sorry he had lost us. For a while it looked as though we were out of luck. Then, "Stop the Car!". There, in a tree near the road sat 10 Short-eared Owls - a marvelous sight! And even as we counted them we sighted more flying over the field ahead. By the time we had finished counting, we had tallied 18 of these interesting diurnal owls, and had marvelled at their beautiful buoyant flight. Our reward for the day - we were elated! From then on there was no stopping us. We found a Northern Shrike, 2 Ruffed Grouse, 20 Snow buntings and 20 Horned Larks, those tinkling harbingers of spring. All these were new species for the list. Now to find Bill! Somehow in all of this, Annette was not being blamed, after all, she was not driving!

Eventually, Bill was sighted coming in the opposite direction (having returned Annette to her car at our original meeting place) and we flagged him down. With straight faces, we demanded to know why he had not waited for us - and listened to his somewhat bristly explanation. Then he said that he and Annette had found a Northern Goshawk. We almost ignored this excellent find in our eagerness to gloat. Then we told him about our 6 new species, purposely saving our best for the last. "And", we chorused, "18 Short-eared Owls!" The incredulous look on bill's face threw us into fits of laughter - our revenge was complete! Bill, who is a great sport, aptly described himself as "ulcerated".

There is a postscript to this story. At the end of the day my phone rang. It was Bill to inquire as to why we hadn't completed our list. He had followed our directions to the owly place, and besides the owls he discovered a Pileated

Woodpecker and a group of Gray Partridge which we had missed! Our original list for the day was 26 species. Add to that Bill's Pileated Woodpecker and Gray Partridge, not forgetting the Ulcerated Turkey, one Blameless Bird and 4 Doddering Dodos, you'll have to agree that the sum total represented a fun-filled birding day. Sharp-shinned Hawks have been making their presence known at feeders. They have appeared in the yards of Moreen Ready, John Goodman and Ken Kentziger. Tim Hendrick saw a 'sharpie' kill and pluck an American Tree Sparrow, and a bridge club, meeting in Pat McManus' home, witnessed the demise of a downy woodpecker in a like fashion.

Winona Barker has had Mourning doves, a pair of Northern Cardinals and a Pine Siskin at her feeder. She also saw a Barred Owl near her home. She hooted, and the owl replied! Another Barred Owl was seen by Bill Cutfield. It was sitting on a hydro line near Lyndhurst.

Pauline Hockey had, among other species, numerous House Finches and American Goldfinches at her feeder. The 'best' bird at mine is a Red-breasted Nuthatch that comes regularly to feed on the hanging fat. Don Warren told of seeing 4 Bald Eagles on the ice a little earlier in the season. Eagles seem to have been prevalent in this area this winter. You perhaps will have noticed the growing number of hawks at the roadsides. Red-tailed Hawks seem to be numerous, and certainly Rough-legged Hawks have been present in greater numbers than last year. Winona Barker has seen this species regularly near her home for some time.

By the time you read this Red-winged Blackbirds and other harbingers of spring should have arrived. Please call 359-5178 with your sightings and until next month  
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