

There are more spectacular places to view Fall migration than Tioga County, but our locale represents an area rich in both avian diversity and abundance. It is not Cape May, where I have observed on a number of occasions an enormous amount of birds gathered and waiting, because of windy and inclement weather, to make the 20 mile flight across the Delaware Bay. The unscheduled migratory stop, called a *fallout*, saturated the area with so many birds that merely lifting the binoculars to the trees almost guaranteed the sighting of a songbird.

The very high number of birds reminded me of a sunny January day in Southern Florida when I observed over 100 American Robins on a young 25 foot shade tree spending their winter by keeping company with the elderly ‘final migrants’ at a retirement community. This ironic combination still intrigues me as to which group was responsible for passing out the winter vacation invitations first. Another time at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania, I viewed over 7,000 raptors above North Lookout in obvious optimal migratory conditions.

Although the skies and waterways of Tioga County are not bursting at the seams with birds, the local migratory seasons are still powerful experiences for any bird watcher. Our area is like the surfer waiting through a series of seven wave patterns and catching a great short ride on number 49 instead of being in Mozambique surfing the ultimate break for 6 continuous miles as the ‘Endless Summer’ boys did.

It was with the usual expectation and an unscientific frame of reference that I joined members of our Tiadaghton Audubon Society (TAS) on September 5 for the weekly nature walk to observe birds for the ‘fun of it’.

Dianne Franco, Kathy Riley, and Gary Tyson had already decided to bird a few trails that intersect with Baldwin Run Road. In six previous weekly walks they had compiled an extensive list of birds at places throughout the county with the varied habitats of large waterways, marshes, fields, and woods. The Baldwin Run area is almost entirely wooded. While Red Efts, Chipmunks, and stands of American Chestnuts held our interest, the initial complete lack of birds brought an eerie quality to our mission.

Although the misty, drizzly, and cloudy morning was the condition pointed out as the cause of the bird vacuum, this reason was probably more of an indication of our lack of knowledge concerning avian movement. Birding just as I prefer: four amateurs traipsing around in the woods, having a good time, awaiting the unexpected. After an hour with only the strange sighting of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird sipping water that had gathered in the deep furrowed bark of a Chestnut Oak, we got into Dianne’s car and drove off to a trail where she and Bob Ross had discovered a nesting pair of Barred Owls the previous month.

Our enthusiasm became tempered with the similar ‘zero bird’ reality of the previous trail and our possible Barred Owl observation was reduced to Dianne’s pointing to and saying, “there is the nest hole in the crook of that Sugar Maple”. Gary’s knocking at the base of the tree only served to augment the scene of four birders silently waiting for something, anything, to happen. We turned and began walking back to the car humbled with the passive acceptance of our role as observers comfortable not being able to direct our will on nature.

As I commented to the others that “being in the woods” to a birder was similar to “being on the water” after a very slow day of fishing, the break in the woods at the gas-line right of way suddenly became totally alive with birds!

The Black-capped Chickadees and the Dark-eyed Juncos seemed to lead the other birds like Indian scouts through the forest to food a-plenty, again performing this duty, almost as a reward and a response to the psychic stimuli of four birders in need of a sighting. Black-and-White, Blackburnian, and Black-throated Green Warblers began darting everywhere, easy to pick out and marvel over because they were still close to breeding plumage. Fall Warblers in migration can present problems for even the experienced birder and knowledge of diagnostic markings is essential to minimize confusion. The wide white tail band of a bird that was in abundance and active before us, although completely unlike its Spring appearance, confirmed the presence of a Magnolia Warbler. Also the unique yellow rump finalized the identification of a Yellow-rumped Warbler and, with the earlier sighting of a Common Yellowthroat, radically altered the morning’s opinion from ‘not much happening’ to a ‘warbler feast’. Various other birds, including the gentle Brown Creeper and the Blue-headed Vireo, inflated our list of bird species seen to 23.

With all the constant movement and color, I have found bird watching to be one of the most exciting consequences and uses of light. I envision the light of today’s birding experience beginning its journey from the Sun to Earth, then leaving with images that disperse into the Universe, waiting to be reassembled some day by a space-traveling emissary with the proper techno capabilities, to be used as proof of the delicate diversity of flying colors from another planet. The images produced from thinly slicing slivers of Jasper or contemplating silence have the potential to produce the same results.

Birding is such an enjoyable activity for me. It’s as if when I am watching birds I am more than looking, but am actually flying away with them. Where the wild things are is waiting for all of us. Walk gently and the message will be revealed.

**Birdwatch** appears the second Wednesday of each month in the Outdoor Section of the Wellsboro Gazette. The Tiadaghton Audubon Society meets at 7:30pm, the third Wednesday of each month (Sept. – May), at the Gmeiner Cultural Center in Wellsboro, Pa. For more information about scheduled bird walks or local birding events, please visit our website at [www.tiaudubon.org](http://www.tiaudubon.org)