

Social Distance Crazy-as-a-Coot Bird Walks: August 4, 2020 (mostly)

A few notes on the August 4 lists:

Yay birders from afar! A nice showing in these summer doldrums. See lists below. And, mark your calendars: next Social Distance Bird Walk will be in a week – August 18!

Many of us are “hot & bothered” in these Dog Days of Summer – well, at least I am. Perhaps the birds feel the same – adults are mostly finished with mating and raising young and are trying to molt new feathers and curtail the feeding of newly fledged young that must now learn to fend for themselves. And, this summer’s hatching year (HY) birds are growing feathers, learning to fly, feeding themselves - mostly, trying not to be another animal’s supper, and reacting to the strange impulse to migrate to an unknown land. These life tasks would all be difficult in more moderate weather, but to have to persevere in these sultry Dog Days is daunting. So, I’m not surprised that birders and birds were few and far between for this last Social Distance Bird Walk. Take heart: cooler days and better birding are coming soon.

For the fun of it, here is a passage from the Old Farmer’s Almanac about the origin of the Dog Days of Summer – no surprise that it is rooted in astronomy and the need of the Ancients to explain their world. From the time I first learned of Sirius the Dog Star sharing the celestial sphere with the sun in summer, I have appreciated the notion of the Dog Days. By my reckoning the sultry Dog Days will end on August 31 – and I will be expecting immediate relief – HA!

“We often hear about the “dog days” of summer but few know what the expression means. Some say that it signifies hot sultry days “not fit for a dog,” others suggest it’s the weather in which dogs go mad. The Dog Days of Summer describes the most oppressive period of summer, between July 3rd and August 11th each year. But where did the term come from? And what does it have to do with dogs?

Why Are They Called the “Dog Days” of Summer?

The phrase is actually a reference to the fact that, during this time, the Sun occupies the same region of the sky as Sirius, the brightest star visible from any part of Earth and part of the constellation Canis Major, the Greater Dog. This is why Sirius is sometimes called the Dog Star.

In the summer, Sirius rises and sets with the Sun. On July 23rd, specifically, it is in conjunction with the Sun, and because the star is so bright, the ancient Romans believed it actually gave off heat and added to the Sun’s warmth, accounting for the long stretch of sultry weather. They referred to this time as *diēs caniculārēs*, or “dog days.”

Thus, the term Dog Days of Summer came to mean the 20 days before and 20 days after this alignment of Sirius with the Sun—July 3 to Aug. 11.” – Farmer’s Almanac

Again, for the fun of it, check this out: summer days and birds at the shore – from Bird

Note: <https://www.birdnote.org/listen/shows/crow-and-gull>

~ Both lists are an aggregate of observations from the two groups of observers (B.I. and Afar).

~ [Things in brackets are notes by me = kg]

Block Island

Canada Geese – 11

Ring-necked Pheasant – 8

Black-crowned Night Heron - 1

Sharp-shinned Hawk – 2

Mourning Dove – 5

Downy Woodpecker – 1

American Kestrel – 1

American Crow – 9

Fish Crow – 2

Blue Jay – 4

Barn Swallow – 22

Black-capped Chickadee – 3

Carolina Wren – 9

American Robin – 1

Gray Catbird – 14

European Starling – 2

Yellow Warbler – 2

Common Yellowthroat – 2

Rufous-sided Towhee – 4+

Song Sparrow – 5+

Northern Cardinal – 2

Red-winged Blackbird – 4

American Goldfinch – 15+

House Sparrow – 7

From Afar Cambridge, MA; Seattle WA; Sutherlin, OR; Frederick, MD;

*=European species.

Mallard – 10+

Great Blue Heron – 1

Green Heron – 1

Turkey Vulture – 2

Osprey – 2

Gull species – 2+

Rock Pigeon – 4

Belted Kingfisher – 2

Red-breasted Sapsucker – 1

American Crow – 1+

California Scrub Jay - 1

American Robin – 5

Gray Catbird - 6

European Starling – 3

Cedar Waxwing – 6

Black-throated Gray Warbler – 1

Common Yellowthroat – 2

Spotted Towhee – 1

White-crowned Sparrow – 1

Song Sparrow – 1

Sparrow species – 5

Western Tanager – 1

Northern Cardinal – 7

Common Grackle – 3

American Goldfinch – 5+

Curt Milton, Seattle, Washington: Sigh. Didn't get out until after lunch. Didn't see much. Too hot for birds to be out, I think. Clear skies and temps in the mid- to upper-70s. Tree trimmers arrived early this morning and interrupted my

plans for the Washington Park Arboretum. Next time! Thanks again for being the Alpha Bird on this walk! Here is what I saw: Gulls: 2, White crowned sparrow, Song sparrow, Crow, Rock pigeons: 4

Debbie Martin, Verbal report: 2 or 3 Hatch Year (HY) immature Sharp-shinned hawks hopping around the yard and driveway cobbling up HY Starlings.

Erica Anderson - Eugene OR / Penny Lapham - Roseburg, OR: Mom & I went out for a walk around a reservoir in Sutherlin, Oregon. The weather was chilly and the clouds were hanging low so we were walking through a mist. The area is filled with Ash, Oak, Fir, Willow and Hawthorne trees along with thistles, blackberries and cattails. The area around the edge of the lake was open marshy that has dried is full of the thistles, Poison Hemlock and dried up cow parsnip surrounded by forest. The Goldfinches have lost their glorious yellow and were busy pulling the thistle down off the thistles. We watched a sparrow (unidentified might have been a Song Sparrow) eat blackberries off the vine. The cedar waxwing stopped and posed perfectly on a branch while grooming it's wing and stretching all the wing feathers out so the red was unmistakable. The Yellowthroats would pop out of a blackberry bush, fly to another and disappear quickly. Very frustrating. As a finale, just as we were getting in our cars to go to our respective homes, the two osprey started calling and flew over the reservoir and circled above us, with the vulture off in the distance.

-- Red breasted sap sucker 1, 10+ mallards, Great Blue Heron 1, Spotted Towhee juvenile 1, Belted Kingfisher 2, California Scrub Jay 1, Black-capped Chickadee 1, Black-throated Gray Warbler (rarely black & white's here) 1, Western Tanager 1, Cedar Wax Wing 1, American Goldfinches 5+, Common Yellow Throat 2, Osprey 2, Turkey Vulture 2

Kim Gaffett – 7/8 (late) Clay Head Trail (western middle section). 2 Ring-necked Pheasant, 1 Black-crowned Night Heron, 7 American Crow, 2 Fish Crow, 4 Blue Jay, 1 Downy Woodpecker, 3 Black-capped Chickadee, 9 Carolina Wren, 11 Gray Catbird, 1 American Robin, 2 Common Yellowthroat, 2 Yellow Warbler, 4 Eastern Towhee, 5 Song Sparrow, 2 N. Cardinal, 4 Red-winged Blackbird, 3 American Goldfinch.

Martha Veilie-Gass, Cambridge, MA: I saw a Green Heron and Cedar Waxwings at Fresh Pond yesterday, plus the usual cast of characters - immature robins and cardinals, catbirds, and sparrows. I have my tea in the backyard each morning and am visited regularly by three grackles about 6:00 am who stalk about, then vanish for the rest of the day. [If no number of individuals is indicated I will conservatively estimate and record as 5 individuals for each species. -kg]

Nina Tang, Frederick, MD. I know this bird count may be too late to include in the report for this week, but I figured I would try to send anyway! 2 northern cardinals (one male, one female), 3 European starlings, 4 very hungry gray squirrels, 1 gray catbird who was stunned after flying into a window, so we let her safely recover in a large dark box before releasing her again! These were taken from Frederick, MD!

Susan Matheke – My bird tally somehow did not get sent in. This is actually Tuesday morning early at Ball Farm and my field. And truly not everything. However I was pleased to see that the pheasant family that I have been watching is growing and intact. I saw five small pheasants and their mother looking very healthy and scampering around the field. Other birds that are regularly seen in the early morning: 22 barn swallows on the wire, 12+ goldfinch, 7 house sparrows, 2 american crows, 3 catbird, 11 Canada Geese, 5 Mourning Doves