

2022 Cy-Hawk Big Day Challenge

Chris Edwards

The ninth annual Cy-Hawk Big Day Challenge was held over Labor Day weekend, September 3-5. The Big Day Challenge is an annual competition between the Iowa City Bird Club and Big Bluestem Audubon Society of Ames. The club that records the most bird species wins the coveted Kent-Dinsmore traveling trophy, a duck decoy painted black and gold on one side, and cardinal and gold on the other side. And more importantly, the winning club gets bragging rights for the next year. Prior to this year, the Hawkeyes led the all-time series with five wins, two losses, and one tie. But last year the Cyclones throttled us, 142-127, which provided some extra motivation this year.

To keep the event fresh, we've tweaked the rules over the years. This year we expanded the event from one day to all three days of Labor Day weekend, and individual birders were allowed to submit a species checklist from one of the three days. This format was very popular as it allowed people to participate whenever their schedules allowed. Expanding the event to multiple days also added another dynamic – I updated and distributed the master checklist each night, so participants going out Sunday and Monday knew which species to target.

Like last year, each team was limited to five adjacent counties around their home area. This year our counties were Johnson, Linn, Louisa, Des Moines, and Lee. The southern counties were included with the goal of finding some lingering SE Iowa breeding specialties, but surprisingly that didn't pan out. Big Bluestem's counties were Story, Boone, Polk, Greene, and Jasper.

The weekend weather was pleasant and didn't play a big factor. Iowa City had high temperatures in the low to mid-70s all three days, with mostly cloudy skies, no precipitation, and light north or easterly winds. We fielded a total of 19 participants, including four parties Saturday, four parties Sunday, and six parties Monday. We covered our core areas well, with multiple visits to Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Lake Macbride, Hickory Hill Park, Waterworks Prairie Park, Terry Trueblood Recreation Area, and Cedar River Crossing. One party spent an entire day scouring Linn County, another party visited Cone Marsh, and two parties visited SE Iowa including Shimek State Forest and Heron Bend Conservation Area.

On Saturday we got off to a strong start with 124 species. Highlights included Northern Bobwhite, Sandhill Crane, White-rumped Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Bank Swallow, Northern Mockingbird, and Lark Sparrow. The highest total was submitted by Diana Pesek, birding with Jerry Denning and James Huntington, with 101 species.

On Sunday 117 species were found, including 13 new species, for a two-day total of 137. Headliners were Pileated Woodpecker, Willow Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Savannah Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager. Dean Hester submitted Sunday's top list with 79 species.

On Monday we expected it would be difficult to add new species to our list, with 137 already in the bank. But we had our best day of the weekend – we found 132 species, including 13 new species, giving us 150 for the weekend! Monday highlights included Trumpeter Swan, Forster's Tern, Merlin, Marsh Wren, Carolina Wren, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Blue-winged Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Northern Parula, Palm Warbler, and the first Common Grackles of the weekend. James Huntington was a one-man wrecking crew, adding seven species to the weekend tally and turning in the highest list with 102 species.

Big Bluestem Audubon Society, with 12 participants in nine teams, had another strong year. Eric Ollie had their strongest individual effort with 100 species. Their highlights included Gray Partridge, Common Gallinule, Red-necked Phalarope, Fish Crow, Kentucky Warbler, and Cape May Warbler. Their weekend total was 137 species – which means the trophy returns to Iowa City! Two bird families made up nearly the entire difference in our team totals – we had the edge in shorebirds species (16-8) and waterfowl (11-7). They had the edge in warblers (24-22). The combined species list of both teams was 166. Thanks (and congratulations) to everyone who participated. It was a fun weekend. Go Hawks!

Participants: Elizabeth Aubrey, Tom Bootsmiller, Gerry Denning, Chris Edwards, Dean Hester, James Huntington, Terry Macey, Mark Madsen, Jamie McCoy, Logan Melvin, Diana Pesek, Hai-Dang Phan, Linda Quinn, Richard Randell, Deb Rolfes, Mark Rolfes, Linda Rudolph, Janet Seiz, Eliza Willis.

BIRDS FOUND ONLY BY IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB (29 SPECIES)

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Northern Shoveler | Baird's Sandpiper | Bell's Vireo |
| American Wigeon | White-rumped Sandpiper | Bank Swallow |
| Northern Pintail | Buff-breasted Sandpiper | Carolina Wren |
| Green-winged Teal | Pectoral Sandpiper | Veery |
| Lesser Scaup | Semipalmated Sandpiper | Northern Mockingbird |
| Northern Bobwhite | Short-billed Dowitcher | Eurasian Tree Sparrow |
| Sandhill Crane | Black Tern | Savannah Sparrow |
| Semipalmated Plover | Merlin | Blue-winged Warbler |
| Marbled Godwit | Willow Flycatcher | Palm Warbler |
| Stilt Sandpiper | White-eyed Vireo | |

BIRDS FOUND ONLY BY BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY (16 SPECIES)

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ruddy Duck | Eastern Screech-Owl | Kentucky Warbler |
| Gray Partridge | Acadian Flycatcher | Cape May Warbler |
| Common Gallinule | Fish Crow | Blackpoll Warbler |
| Red-necked Phalarope | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| Northern Harrier | Vesper Sparrow | |
| Broad-winged Hawk | Orchard Oriole | |

BIRDS FOUND BY BOTH CLUBS (121 SPECIES, BUT ONLY UNCOMMON SPECIES LISTED)

| | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sora | Red-breasted Nuthatch | Mourning Warbler |
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo | Sedge Wren | Northern Parula |
| Caspian Tern | Marsh Wren | Bay-breasted Warbler |
| Forster's Tern | Gray-cheeked Thrush | Blackburnian Warbler |
| Olive-sided Flycatcher | Lark Sparrow | Black-throated Blue Warbler |
| Yellow-bellied Flycatcher | Golden-winged Warbler | Canada Warbler |
| Philadelphia Vireo | Orange-crowned Warbler | Scarlet Tanager |