

The Wandering Whimbrels and the 2019 Kiptopeke Challenge

Thanks Kiptopeke Challenge supporters! 25th Anniversary!!! After doing the Challenge in a Special Venue, or limited area, last year at Craney Island with Lee Schuster and Bill Williams, our Waterbird Team, Dave and I returned to the 24-hour category, scouring the Eastern Shore. I stayed in the yurt and Dave camped at Kiptopeke and we were up before 5 and walked around Kiptopeke, quickly hearing an Eastern Screech-Owl. At nearby Magotha Road, we heard more screeches and Great Horned Owls and had our best owl morning ever with 5 screeches and 3 Great Horneds!

Two years ago, the songbird flight was terrific at Sunset Beach just 3 miles south, but this year, there was almost no bird movement, so we headed to the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge just across the highway. There we found Seaside Sparrow, Marsh Wren, both night-herons and Clapper Rail. Four Bobwhites flew across the gravel road at Magothy Bay Natural Area, a Wood Duck flock flew by there, our only Eastern Phoebe perched on a wire there and our only Savannah Sparrow popped up briefly on a weed stalk. At nearby Eyre Hall we added American Redstart, one of only 4 warbler species. We often miss Eurasian Collared Dove, but found 2 easily this year at Magotha Road. The Oyster landfill pond gave us only Canada Geese and Pied-billed Grebes, Willis Wharf produced Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone and Short-billed Dowitcher.

Then...Dave got a text from another team, Gull's Gone Wild, saying not too far south of us, a Northern Wheatear was found! That team was so nice to let us know! That species hadn't been found on the Challenge before! We reversed course, found the bird, then headed back north to Chincoteague. We forgot to go to Cape Charles Natural Area Preserve and found out later there were some birds there we missed...oh well.

Chincoteague had been covered well the previous weekend during the VA Society of Ornithology field trip, but only 122 species were found over 3 days by 85 birders...so...we figured it might be tough. And it was. It began to drizzle, but there were highlights...Blue-winged Teal, Piping Plover, Semi-palmated Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, our only Barn Swallow, in the midst of hundreds of Tree Swallows, our only Cattle Egrets and our only Green Heron. Broad-winged was the only regular hawk we missed.

Sunset at the expansive Saxis Marsh was beautiful and we saw the Laughing Falcons team. The wind was calm, great for listening and we added Sora, Virginia Rail and Wilson's Snipe. In our 15-hour day, plus the 1 ½ hour drive home, we managed 103 species, good enough for 3rd place, tied with the Laughing Falcons. A Youth Team won with 114 species.

Our list is enclosed or perhaps will be forwarded in another email as we try to reduce paper use. Our team has raised almost \$3,000 so far and we came in 2nd place for fund-raising last year. Donations are still coming in. Thanks to our great supporters! We had a fine day, as always, supporting CVWO!!!

Brian Taber and Dave Youker, the Wandering Whimbrels