

# Washington Birder - 2023 Big Day Reports

## 2023 Washington State Big Day

15 May 2023, 1:55am – 10:45pm

**Species Total: 187/187 (Team/Shared)**

Team: Liam Hutcheson (187) Samuel Holman (187), Jacob Miller (187)

Traveled: 290 miles by car, 4 miles on foot

Visiting: Liberty, Umptanum & Durr Rd, Wenas area, Oak Creek area, White Pass & Rimrock lake, Cowlitz Wildlife area, Chehalis Valley, Tokeland & Midway Beach, Bottle Beach, Westport

Species of Note:

Stake out: White-throated Swift, Calliope Hummingbird, Snowy Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, Black Backed Woodpecker, White Headed Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Ash Throated Flycatcher, Rock Wren, American Dipper, Lark Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow

Late: Tundra Swan, Canvasback

Rare/Unusual: Sandhill Crane, Solitary Sandpiper, Yellow Headed Blackbird

Missed: Harlequin Duck, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Canada Jay, Fox Sparrow

Narrative:

This narrative covers the Eastern WA part of our trip, since I am much more familiar with the western half and writing it up seems a bit pointless, while the Eastern half needs some tweaking and could be improved.

Starting in the early hours of Sunday May 14 2023, Jacob Miller of Shelton, Samuel Holeman of Goldendale, and I undertook our first ever Washington State Big Day. Aiming for 200 species, we started in Liberty for owls at 0145 and from there eventually made our way to Westport via Wenas, Oak Creek, White Pass, and the Chehalis Valley.

Obviously, any successful big day requires a metric ton of planning. We started about a month before May 14, planning the route and the other logistics of it. A week before the route, I went over to the Wenas/Oak Creek area to scout for the big day, trying to nail down a few of our trickier targets. I ended up finding a Calliope Hummingbird territory, territories for both Black-Backed Woodpecker and White-Headed Woodpecker, and a reliable Lark Sparrow spot. All of these locations carried over successfully to May 14, proving how essential good scouting is. Next year we plan on scouting some other areas more, namely White Pass to improve our chances at a few of our 2023 mountain misses.

Our trip began the afternoon of May 13, where we met up in Olympia and carpoled over to Liberty. We made good time, arriving in Liberty around 2045 and immediately started searching for owls. We ended up locating Poorwills and a singular Flammulated Owl, but nothing else. Getting back to our camping spot around 2330, we heard a Hermit Thrush calling from the hillside. We ended up sleeping on the ground next to the car, since the night seemed too short to deal with tents.

Alarms went off around two hours later at 0145, and we were off by 0200. We searched for over an hour in the Cougar Gulch area of Liberty for the Flam we had heard the prior night unsuccessfully. Off to a tough start, we rushed down out of the mountain to Lions Gulch where the Poorwills had been. We again, missed them and getting worried now decided to continue further up the gulch. Around 0330 we started a Cassin's Finch into singing, our first bird! A few minutes later, Sam's keen ears picked up a Flammulated Owl and a couple minutes later a second joined in. Deciding Liberty was not going to be the way to go for other owls that evening, we took what darkness we had left and raced down highway 97 towards Ellensburg. A quick stop at a riparian patch on Burke road in Teanaway produced a Western-Screech Owl, and further along the highway we ran into Wilson's Snipe winnowing and a calling Western Kingbird, as well as the days only Horned Larks singing from a hillside during another attempt at Poorwills. Our last night stop at the Ellensburg rodeo grounds did not produce Barn Owls, and we decided to call it quits on night birds and head to Umptanum.

At around 0430 we started our daylight birding on Umptanum road. A Spotted Towhee sang from a riparian area along the road, and a surprise Common Poorwill called from somewhere behind us! At 0445 we started up Durr road for sagebrush birds, immediately picking up all the expected sagebrush species except Sagebrush Sparrow. Further up Durr, we encountered two singing Grasshopper Sparrows and a calling Chukar, another nice surprise! Back on Umptanum a Sandhill Crane flew over around 0510, and we picked up Gray Flycatcher. From Umptanum we hurried to N Wenas Rd where I had a Black-backed Woodpecker, White-Headed Woodpecker, and Calliope Hummingbird territory nailed down. All three made good showings, as well as Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, White-Breasted Nuthatch, and the days only Sooty Grouse booming from a stand of Ponderosa.

We started the Wenas Valley around 0600 at Maloy road for Red-Naped Sapsucker (a bird we actually managed to pick up on N Wenas) and riparian things like Bullock's Oriole. From there we birded the valley for a good hour and half, highlights being Lark Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike (hardy Canyon), Ruffed Grouse and Cassin's Vireo (Wenas campground), Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, and Spotted Sandpiper (Wenas Lake), and a pair of Swainson's Hawks I found found while scouting on the way to Naches. We refueled in Naches and headed to Oak Creek.

Our first stop in Oak Creek was the Wildlife area road at 0800 where we picked up Yellow-Breasted Chat and saw a couple Nashville and Macgillvray's Warblers. We also encountered our main target for this location, Lewis's Woodpecker, although we had lucked in to one earlier in the day so it was not new. From there we continued up the valley where we picked up White-Throated Swift, Canyon Wren, Ash Throated Flycatcher, Rufous Hummingbird. As we were leaving Bear Canyon in the upper part of the valley, I got a text from Scott Downes that he had a Rock Wren at the Oak Creek visitors center that morning, a bird we had missed so far. We talked it over and decided we were enough ahead of schedule to backtrack 15 minutes for the Wren. This was our first major mistake of the day, since we ended up spending almost an hour on Rock Wren, a single bird. Although we did end up hearing it, it was a massive waste of time and a mistake we will not be making next year. We continued back up the valley from there, scoping an empty Golden eagle nest on some cliffs across the river and picking up some American

Dippers that were nesting on a rock near Hause Creek Campground. Our misses for Oak Creek included Harlequin Duck, Prairie Falcon, and Golden Eagle.

We began our mountain birding on Bethel ridge where we picked up Hammond's Flycatcher, Williamson's Sapsucker, and a Lincoln's Sparrow that Scott had let us know about. The sparrow was especially tricky, not responding to playback and only coming in when I started phishing as a last ditch effort. Without Scott's help we would have almost certainly never found it. We also had our first of the day Hermit Thrush. Clear Lake was our next stop at around 1045, where did all the time go! This was especially productive, giving us Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Hermit and Townsend's Warblers, and Rough-Winged Swallows. Our next two hours were a major letdown, windy and hot conditions on the pass kept almost all of the birds down. We missed almost every single target, including things like Fox Sparrow, Canada Jay, Three Toed Woodpecker, Black Swift, and others. The only thing new on the pass were a couple Pine Siskin, a very tough bird in Washington this year!

## 2023 County Big Days:

### Wahkiakum County

2 January 2023, 8:00am – 4:30pm

Species Total: 73

Team: Tim Brennan (73)

Traveled: 70 miles by car, 5 miles on foot

Visiting: Cathlamet STP, Julia Butler Hansen, Skamokawa Vista Park, Gray's Bay, Puget Island, Grays River farmland

Species of Note:

Rare: Eurasian wigeon, Canvasback, Trumpeter Swan, Long-billed Dowitcher, Iceland Gull

Narrative: I blogged the day, so there's plenty of narrative for the trip: <https://southwestwashingtonbirding.blogspot.com/2023/01/january-2-big-winter-day-in-wahkiakum.html> Great weather, and lots of breadcrumbs from other birders to follow

### Island County

29 January 2023, 7:00am – 5:30pm

Species Total: 96

Team: Jay Adams (96), Carlos Andersen (96)

Traveled: 152.8 miles by car, 2 miles on foot

Visiting: Clinton Beqch Park, Dave Mackie Park, Ewing Marsh, Sunlight Beach, Deer Lagoon, Lone Lake, Earth Sanctuary, Crockett Lake, Keystone Spit, Fort Casey, Fort Ebey, Grasser's Lagoon, Libbey Beach Park, Hastie Lake Park, Swantown, Dugualla Bay, Pacific Rim Institute

Species of Note:

Stake out: Snow Bunting

Rare: White-throated Sparrow, Rock Sandpiper, Snow Bunting

Missed: Common Raven, Hairy Woodpecker, Pine Siskin, Brown Creeper

### Grays Harbor County

22 April 2023, 6:30am – 5:30pm

Species Total: 102

Team: Liam Hutcheson (102)

Traveled: 80 miles by car, 1.5 miles on foot

Visiting: Chehalis valley including Hoquiam

Species of Note:

Late: Trumpeter Swan

### Grays Harbor County

29 April 2023, 6:50am – 5:45pm

Species Total: 110

Team: Liam Hutcheson (110)

Traveled: 155 miles by car, 3 miles on foot

Visiting: Ocean Shores, Hoquiam, Oakville area of Chehalis valley

Species of Note:

Early: Lapland Longspur

## **Whatcom County**

**29 April 2023, 4:57am – 5:14pm**

**Species Total: 106/85 (Team/Shared)**

Team: Stephen Chase (106), Josiah Chase (85), Titus Chase (85)

Traveled: 89 miles by car, 8 miles on foot

Visiting: Hampton and Trapline Marsh, Sumas Gold Mine Trail, Hannegan Flats, Connelly Creek, Hoag's Pond, Sehome Hill, Padden Lagoon, Flynn Road Retention Pond, Semiahmoo, Birch Bay State Park

Species of Note:

Sunny and seasonally hot. Temperature began at 53 degrees in Everson, was 82 in Lynden, and 74 at Birch Bay. Warbling Vireos had not been reported in Whatcom County as of yet this year, but we had near-fallout conditions with at least 40 throughout the Connelly Creek Trail. We also had strong numbers of Western Tanager, Wilson's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, and Orange-Crowned Warbler. Biggest miss was Pine Siskin, which has been hard to find in the county this season. Rarest birds, according to eBird abundance charts for April, were California Scrub-Jay, Western Tanager, and Solitary Sandpiper.

Narrative:

This was a family-friendly big day. I began on my own and hit the marsh at Hampton and Trapline, and then hiked the Sumas Gold Mine Trail. I then picked up my sons Josiah and Titus around 7am and we drove to Bellingham. We walked large sections of the Interurban Trail, picking up numerous migrant songbirds. We paused around 12:00 to get groceries for mom (did I say family friendly!?), then dropped them off at home after stopping by Flynn Road Retention Pond. We put away groceries and cooled off under the sprinkler, as the temperature was 80 degrees at that point. By 3:00 we were on the road again to the coast, where we picked up a number of seabirds. The big day ended at Birch Bay State Park with a birthday party for my mom (again, see family-friendly caveat!). Considering the breaks, we were very pleased with our numbers!

## **King County**

**6 May 2023, 3:15am – 11:00pm**

**Species Total: 137/133 (Team/Shared)**

Team: Adrian Lee (136), Christian Hagenlocher (136), Matt Dufort (137), Raphael Fennimore (136)

Traveled: 170 miles by car, 9.6 miles on foot

Visiting: Snoqualmie Valley, Stossel Creek, Kent Valley, Saltwater SP, Alki, Montlake Fill, Discovery Park

Species of Note:

Missed: Pine Siskin

Narrative:

This past Saturday Matt Dufort, Adrian Lee, Raphael Fennimore, and myself (Christian Hagenlocher) met at Marymoor Park shortly after 3am to embark on a King County Big Day. Weather conditions looked dreary for the day, with early morning showers dampening our optimism that we would break the incredible King County Big Day record of 137 species, set in 2018 with a team of talented birders, including Adrian, Matt, and Spencer Hildie and Scott Ramos. While setting a record wasn't the goal, that number was the silent benchmark in the back of our mind's as we purposefully moved through the county, adapting our strategies on the fly to hit as many hotspots with a variety of habitats, hoping for close to 130 species.

Marymoor Park was slow birding, with heard-only Killdeer, American Robin, and a Great Blue Heron all before 4am. Although we quietly listened for owls, we didn't hear or see any, despite our hope of encountering a Western-Screech Owl or Barn Owl.

We quickly moved on, picking up some heard-only Virginia Rail and Sora at a marsh, missing our attempts to find owls elsewhere before the dawn chorus began. Shortly after 4:30 am as the sky grew lighter our numbers began picking up as we could detect more species as they started to sing. Tree Swallows and American Robins were both quite vocal, joined by Song Sparrows as the ambient light increased. In the interest of time, we kept moving.

Driving up to Stossel Creek, Matt spotted a Ruffed Grouse in the road, which flushed to a nearby branch for great views. This species is not always an easy pickup in King without some effort, so we were glad to see a second bird soon after further down the trail. As we made our way higher in elevation, it was nice to hear singing Varied Thrush. A tooting Northern Pygmy-Owl was our first owl of the day. We were pleased to encounter a small flock of warblers which included MacGillivray's, Black-throated Gray, Townsend's, and Wilson's. We also had a newly-arrived Hammond's Flycatcher singing, which was a first-of-year (FOY) for some of us.

On our drive down the mountain we had a Barred Owl conveniently perched along the power lines, actively hunting the roadside on our way to the Stillwater Unit of Snoqualmie Wildlife Area. In the next hour and a half we picked up over 50 species, including a single Common Loon flying overhead. Two Dusky Flycatchers were briefly seen by some and heard by all of us, which was a fun addition to our day's growing total. It was a treat to get a good look at a wet Sharp-shinned Hawk perched along the trail, and pick up several other raptors who, like us, were hoping things would dry out as the sun got higher in the sky.

Birding the Snoqualmie Valley from Duvall heading south yielded good waterfowl diversity, including Cinnamon Teal, and Northern Pintail among others. With some close attention, we picked out six different species of swallows, which were forced to feed low over the fields and ponds due to the low weather ceiling and storms moving in.

We knew shorebird numbers haven't been great this year, and struggled to find species outside the norm, but were happy to find a Solitary Sandpiper for the day along W. Snoqualmie River Rd, along with a good assortment of raptors, and our first Vaux's swifts for the day. We found good numbers of American Pipit as well.

Despite our stop at Sikes Lake not being long, it was nice to pick up different sparrow species as we watched a trio of Northern Harriers hunting the marshlands. Turkey Vultures took to the skies around 10:30 am, and we carefully checked all soaring raptors with the expectation of finding a migrating Swainson's Hawk. Five Common Loons flew over together, flying below the clouds towards the sound. With increasing numbers of Vaux's swift, we scanned for Black Swift, which would have been a great pickup, but today wasn't the day.

A brief stop at Tote Bridge netted us two American Dippers in the river, as we worked our way south towards Piano Ranch, where Matt spotted a Yellow-headed Blackbird, and Adrian heard Lesser Goldfinch further north, before we all found them at the expected bend in the road near the ranch. Do keep an ear out for these goldfinches as they seem to be more prolific in King county this year!

Our next major stop was M Street Marsh and Emerald Downs, where we picked up Spotted Sandpiper and our last few freshwater duck species, and a surprise Merlin hunting over the stables on the opening race day for the season. We didn't stay long due to the traffic, and better birds beckoning further north in the Kent Valley!

We kept our eyes to the sky in the afternoon as we worked our way through multiple area hotspots, adding only a handful of new species. By this time we'd broken 100 and needed to head towards Puget Sound in order to finish off the easier birds before dark. Raphael's keen eye and expectancy of Swainson's Hawk paid off as we spotted one at our last stop in the valley before heading to Saltwater State Park.

The rain arrived as we scoped Puget Sound, checking off a lingering Common Goldeneye, all three grebe species, and all three cormorant species to our day list. Several quick stops on our way north to Alki produced Harlequin Ducks and Surf Scoters. We were bolstered by the boom of new birds to our day list, but the record still seemed unlikely. Nevertheless, we kept birding.

Arriving at Union Bay Natural Area, our pace had slowed down as the morning's caffeine had worn off, and the drizzle dampened our spirits. The birds we knew we had left were unlikely, but with an observant band of birders we knew we were up for the task. Scoping through dozens of Lesser Scaup on Lake Washington produced one Greater Scaup (good pick, Matt!) a FOY Long-billed Dowitcher flyover surprised us all as it headed north (great ear Adrian with the call note!) and both Cedar Waxwing (Matt) Green Heron (me) and Western Wood-Pewee all helped boost our morale. We left the fill after sunset, and decided giving Discovery Park our last effort could be worth it. Could we break the record? We were close...

We made our way directly to West Point, hoping to detect the California Quail we had seen there earlier in the week. Raphael had some insight to where he thought it was roosting, and High-fives were exchanged when we did find it in our flashlights! While it was dark, the crepuscular glow was enough to scope the sound, which was nearly devoid of any birds, except for a flock of Brant resting off the point. A flock of Sanderling on the beach was another fabulous flashlight find! Leaving West Point, we had great looks at a Barn Owl hunting along the road which was a spectacular finish to the day. We didn't hear any Great Horned Owls or Saw-whets, but it wasn't for lack of trying!

Overall, it was a great adventure, the first time birding together for this group! We all ended this marathon day tired, and more appreciative of one another as teammates. Matt's expert planning, Adrian's keen ears and enthusiasm, Raphael's knowledge and insight of some great spots, and my own attempt at eBirding everything all played a role in such a spectacular and special day birding. I can certainly say I'm more knowledgeable about King County and forward to having time to continue exploring and birding here! We ended the day with a total of 139 species (140 if you count Ring-necked Pheasant). A very big day indeed! If you made it this far, thanks for reading!

#### **Chelan County**

**27 May 2023, 4:15am – 10:00pm**

**Species Total: 121/121 (Team/Shared)**

Team: Neil Paprocki (121), Tucker Jonas (121)

Traveled: 130 miles by car, 4 miles on foot

Visiting: Colockum Rd, YoYo Rock Boat Launch, Kingsbury Rd, Malaga Ponds, Number 2 Canyon, Walla Walla Point Park, Burch Mountain, Sleepy Hollow Rd, Fish Lake, White River Rd, Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery, Camas Meadows

Species of Note:

Rare/Unusual: Red-breasted Merganser

Missed: Belted Kingfisher

Narrative:

We got stuck in the mud on Kingsbury Rd from about 7:45am to 9:45am. We were doing pretty well up until that point so decided to keep going after getting pulled out. Thanks Johnna!

**Benton County****2 September 2023, 6:00am – 11:59pm****Species Total: 109**

Team: Rowan Young-McMurchie (109)

Traveled: 188 miles by car, 4.5 miles on foot

Visiting: Umatilla NWR -- Paterson Slough Unit, McNary Dam, Columbia Park, Bateman Island, Inland Asphalt Ponds, W.E. Johnson Park, Horn Rapids County Park, Rattlesnake Mtn - South Slope, Prosser Dam

Species of Note:

Late: Western Kingbird

Missed: Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Pheasant, Anna's Hummingbird, Long-billed Dowitcher, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Loggerhead Shrike, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, House Wren

Narrative:

Slept in a little too long and got a later start than I had anticipated. Got a flat tire out at Paterson Slough and got stuck there for an additional two hours before rescue. Had to scratch a couple locations and reduce time at a few more to make up for that deficit. Ended the day a little early for a prior obligation. No owling efforts whatsoever. Considering all of this the day was extremely successful but a higher total is definitely possible.

**Clallam County****14 October 2023, 5:00am – 7:00pm****Species Total: 104**

Team: Liam Hutcheson (104)

Traveled: 8.5 miles by car, 2 miles on foot

Visiting: Neah Bay town

Species of Note:

Vagrant: Lesser Goldfinch, Indigo Bunting

Rare/Unusual: Orchard Oriole

Late: Yellow Warbler

Narrative: Neah Bay town only big day

**Franklin County****10 November 2023, 8:00am – 4:15pm****Species Total: 76**

Team: Jason Fidorra (76)

Visiting: Chiawana, Animal shelter, Sacajawea, Scootenev, Ringold

Species of Note:

Vagrant: White-breasted Nuthatch

Rare/Unusual: Hairy Woodpecker, Bonaparte's gull, American Tree Sparrow

Late: Long-billed Dowitcher, Pectoral Sandpiper

Narrative:

Started strong finding a WBNU and refinding the Hairy Woodpecker (2 new county life birds), plus OCWA, HETH, MERL at Chiawana. Slow adds until Scootenev where extensive mudflats holding over 150 LBDO, 300 DUNL, 80 KILL, 2 GRYE, and a late Pectoral Sandpiper. It's a good day to find 5 species of shorebird in migration in Franklin, let alone winter!

**Big Day Reports from earlier years:****Columbia County****9 June 2022, 12:31am – 8:34pm** (correcting month from last year)**Species Total: 101**

Team: Christopher Lindsey (101)

Traveled: 167 miles by car, 7.5 miles on foot

Visiting: Lewis &amp; Clark Trail SP, Kendall Skyline Rd, North Touchet Rd, Dayton, Tucannon Fish Hatchery &amp; Vicinity (Spring, Rainbow, Watson &amp; Beaver Lakes), Starbuck, Fletcher Rd, Little Goose Dam

Species of Note:

Rare: Sora

Uncommon: Virginia Rail, Long-eared Owl

**Klickitat County****20 June 2022, 12:00am – 11:35pm** (correcting month from last year)**Species Total: 112**

Team: Christopher Lindsey (112)

Traveled: 160 miles by car, 9.3 miles on foot

Visiting: NF-80, Trout Lake Natural Area Preserve, Conboy NWR (Willard Springs Foot Trail, BZ Glenwood Hwy), Bingen Pond, Locke Lake, Lyle Balch Cemetery, Balch Lake

Species of Note:

Rare: Black Tern