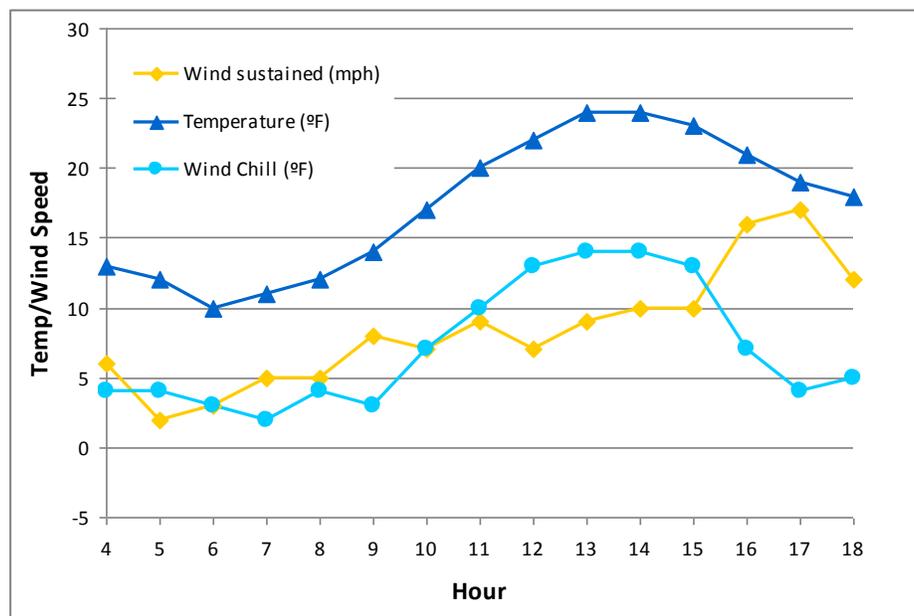


Superbowl of Birding X with the Twitchers in the Rye – January 26, 2013

This year the “Twitchers in the Rye” (captain Pam Hunt, driver Becky Suomala, Pat Myers, and Andrea Robbins) scored a major bonus; we actually spent the night within the town of Rye. This was thanks to the generosity of Pam Hall of Normandeau Associates. Thus, somewhere around 4:30 a.m. on January 26, Andrea stepped outside our lodgings and heard the first bird of the day. It didn’t count for a couple of reasons: first, it was before the official starting time of 5:00, and second, it was a rooster. Pam was outside shortly thereafter, when a shooting star set the stage for the exciting day to come.

Because of the cottage, we were less than five minutes from our first stop: owling at the Rye Recreation Area. Here, as in 2012, we met Steve Mirick’s team, the “NH 4th and Longspurs” at 5 a.m. and spent the next 10-15 minutes whistling into the moonlit darkness. But neither Eastern Screech-Owl nor Northern Saw-whet Owls deemed it appropriate to respond, and we headed off to Love Lane – with similar results. The next stop was a new one: the old Rye Airstrip, where we’d learned of the presence of Barred Owls through a chance encounter with a local resident (human, not avian!) while scouting – with similar results. Time was running out (Pam had set a strict schedule for this year, and we were trying stick to it), so we returned to the Rye Recreation Area to see if the screech-owls had warmed up (they hadn’t) and moved on to Marsh Pond. A cardinal chipped, Pam hooted a few times, and at 6:26 we finally heard a Great Horned Owl calling from its usual spot across the pond. With a little twilight left we tried for screech-owl a final time at Odiorne Point State Park (you guessed it – no owls) and began the second phase of our master plan.

But first, a word from our meteorologist. The weather is always of note during the Superbowl of Birding, since often as not we’ve had to confront sub-freezing temperatures, gusty winds, or both (it **is** late January, after all). This year was forecast to be both windy and cold with temps in the 20s chilled to single digits by the wind. However, the winds were light during our pre-dawn owling, and we didn’t really notice them until we reached the coast around 7 a.m. Even then, they could have been a lot worse, and the wind overall wasn’t much of an issue until the last couple of hours, when, as you can see on the graph, they really started to pick up. Overall, this was our second coldest Superbowl, but we were (mostly) ready for it.

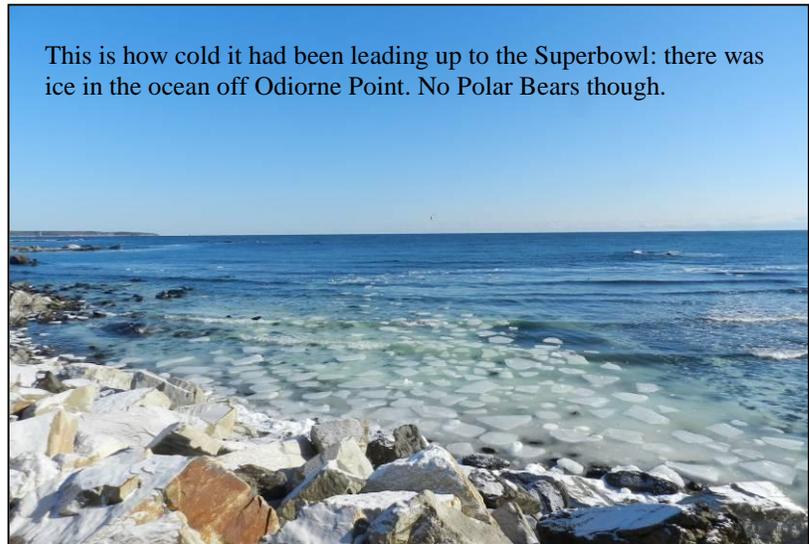


Back to the plan, which moved to a morning sea watch from Pulpit Rocks. The goal here was to catch any offshore movement of seabirds first thing in the morning. We were generally successful in this endeavor, with large numbers of loons and grebes flying north, plus most of the expected sea ducks. We were less lucky with alcids; Pam and Becky were the only ones to get any of several Razorbills, and Pam had the dubious honor of shouting “murre” just as the bird in question landed on the ocean and

disappeared into the waves. A Carolina Wren singing from the residential area behind us gave the signal that Phase Three of the plan needed to begin.

Inland we went, and over the next 2.5 hours scoured the residential areas of northern Rye. Most of the expected feeder birds were found handily along Brackett Road, where Hairy Woodpeckers (missed last year) were a dime a dozen. Scouted rarities were not found, but since many (e.g., towhee and yellowthroat) hadn't been seen for 2-5 weeks, this was not terribly unexpected. But searches for these rarities netted us our first Common Redpoll and Cedar Waxwings, two species that had been hard to find recently in the immediate seacoast.

Phase Four of The Plan had us back at the coast for high tide, when ducks would hopefully be forced into view in the flooded marshes. But given a recent run of cold temperatures, we found the marshes mostly frozen and largely duckless. The consolation prize was a nice total of over 25 Hooded Mergansers for the day – probably birds forced towards the coast after inland water bodies had frozen. At Rye Harbor State Park we finally had reason to call in a five-point bird (for new readers, each species in the Superbowl of Birding is assigned from



This is how cold it had been leading up to the Superbowl: there was ice in the ocean off Odiorne Point. No Polar Bears though.

1-5 points based on seasonal rarity, and the rarest need to be called in so other teams know about them). This was the American Pipit that had been frequenting Ragged Neck since December, and which Pat spotted perched on a rock across the lawn. Following this success, we searched without success for the local Belted Kingfisher, although a local resident assured us it had been present earlier in the morning.

By this point our stomachs were telling us it was time to implement Phase Five – a return inland for lunch and land birding in southern Rye. We called in our sandwich order to the Hungry Horse (all on rye, or course) and took a quick turn into the Rye cemetery, where in 2010 we found a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. On our way out – birdless – Becky took a wrong turn into a dead end (pun not intended), and we found one of our best birds for the day. It was an immature Pine Warbler feeding with a flock of bluebirds, and while worth only four points, gave us the satisfaction of finding something unusual that we hadn't already known about. After picking up our food, we continued on to Random Road (yes, that's its real name), where Becky and Andrea had found a Pine Grosbeak while scouting the week before. The fruit trees were still loaded, but the grosbeak wasn't around, although we did get another consolation prize: two immature Bald Eagles circling overhead.

On our way back to the coast we were blessed with fortuitous finds. After looking for unexpected waterfowl at a "swan pond" along Garland Road, we heard our first-ever Superbowl raven (another 4-pointer) and while listening for creepers near the Rye water supply heard – and briefly saw – a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (5 points, and another call to Superbowl Central). At the back of Eel Pond, while stopped at a stream crossing, Pam saw some movement that turned out to be a Belted Kingfisher. Shortly thereafter she heard a Brown Creeper, but it steadfastly refused to call again. Fortunately, as we returned to the car, Pat saw the creeper going up a tree. Fortuitous indeed, especially since neither

species was expected at this location (and now we didn't need to spend any more time at Rye Harbor for a kingfisher!).

So now we had finally reached Phase Six, which gave us roughly two hours to work our way back up the coast looking for anything we might have missed. We got off to a good start at Rye Ledge, with Purple Sandpipers and Black Scoters, but suffered a setback when we found that Eel Pond had been almost completely claimed by ice (so much for scouted Lesser Scaup). The wind was picking up, so after a couple more quick scans along the coast, we made our (almost) last stand in the lee of the Seacoast Science Center. Our target: Razorbills. But again we were stymied, as birds found by Pam and Becky could not be relocated by Andrea and Pat, and for the second year in a row we ended up not getting this species for our list despite it being seen by half the team. Our *real* last stand turned out to be a scan of the harbor mudflats from the Wentworth Golf Course, which yielded our final new species: a flock of five Dunlin (another Twitchers' first).

And then it was over. At the compilation in Newburyport we eagerly awaited the awarding of door prizes (since, as readers of past summaries may recall, it was Pam's or Pat's turn to win a pair of binoculars). Such was not to be (binoculars weren't even an option this year), but all of us except Andrea ended up with some form of bird seed. But it wasn't over yet – there was still the awarding of the major prizes, something we've never seriously considered given our self-imposed geographic restriction. So as the Master of Ceremonies began his lead in to the "Rockingham County Rocks" award, not everyone was paying attention. But M.C. Dave Larson started his spiel "...with 106 points and 62 species... and wrapped it up with "...Twitchers in the Rye," and Becky essentially reacted like a contestant on "The Price is Right." We had the most points in Rockingham County!*

As we bask in our glory, we'd like to thank all our sponsors. We're closing in on \$1,800 in pledges, all of which will go to support *New Hampshire Bird Records* and NH eBird!

Until next year!

Pam Hunt for the Twitchers in the Rye

* In the interest of full disclosure, we won because of two events completely outside our control:

- 1) Steve Mirick's team blew us out of the water, with 182 points and 83 species. But because those totals actually earned the "NH 4th and Longspurs" the Grand Prize, the Rockingham County prize went to the second place point total for New Hampshire.
- 2) We were the only other team in Rockingham County.

But hey, we'll take it! And extra thanks to the other NH teams that ended up not competing this year.

** The pictures below are entirely whimsical. We brought four "songbird toys" with us and documented their travels!



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in the Rye cemetery.



Hooded Warbler at Odiorne (don't we wish!).

The list:

Canada Goose
Mute Swan
American Black Duck
Mallard
Common Eider
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Horned Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Great Cormorant
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Sanderling*

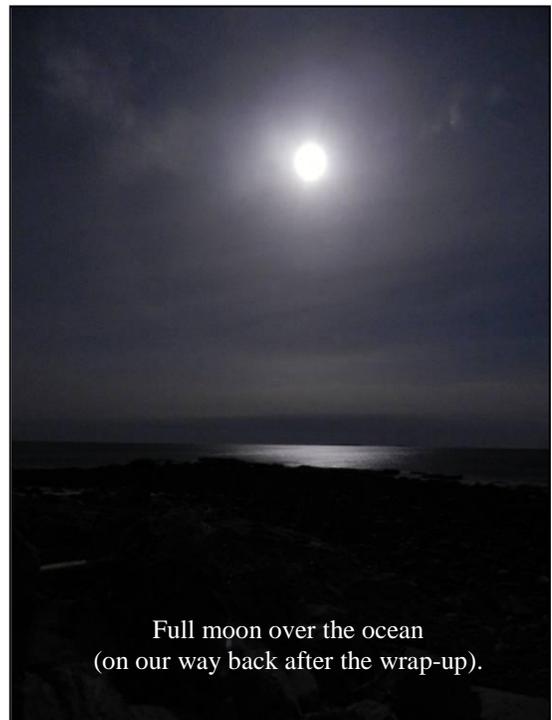
Purple Sandpiper
Dunlin*
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Great Horned Owl
Belted Kingfisher*
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
Blue Jay
American Crow
Common Raven*
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Carolina Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
American Pipit*
Pine Warbler*
American Tree Sparrow
Song Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
House Finch
Common Redpoll
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

* species seen for the first time by the Twitchers. Five-pointers are in bold.



Twitchers in the Rye 2013 (left to right: Pat Myers, Becky Suomala, Andrea Robbins, and Pam Hunt).



Full moon over the ocean
(on our way back after the wrap-up).