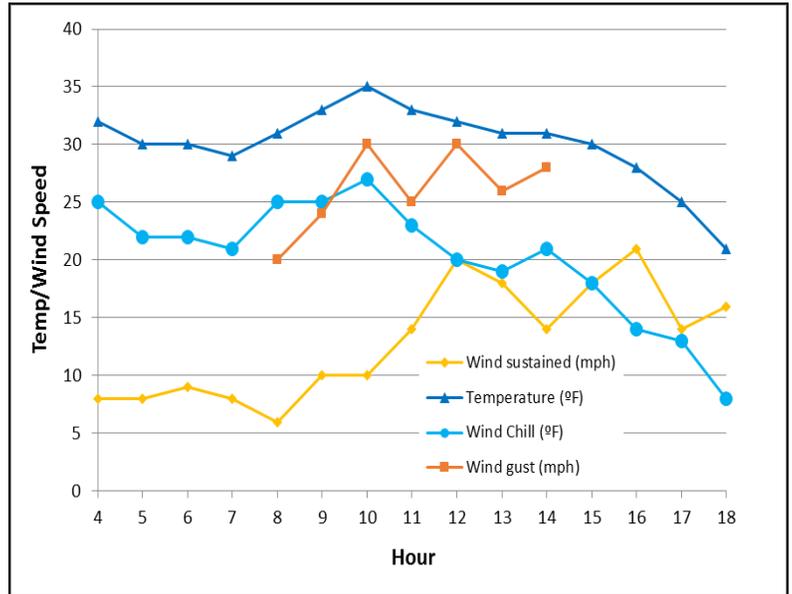


## Superbowl of Birding XII with the Twitchers in the Rye – January 25, 2015

Once again the weather made news on the weekend of the “Superbowl of Birding,” this time to the extent that event organizers actually made use of the snow date for the first time since we’ve participated. Yes it snowed, and as a result we ended up heading coastward VERY early Sunday morning instead of staying over as we have the last three years. And although we were glad to not have to bird in the snow, the Sunday forecast was none too warm (as has been typical this winter) and a tad windy.

But as the graph to the right shows, we ended up not having that bad a day on the weather front, with temperatures dropping and wind increasing only for the afternoon, and it wasn’t until we were almost ready to wrap up that it really became all that bad. Over the seven years the “Twitchers” have been doing this, this year was essentially in the middle in terms of weather – we’ll take it!

And so it was that our fearless team (back to the usual suspects of Pam Hunt, Becky Suomala, Pat Myers, and Andrea Robbins) pulled off on the side of Route 1A at Odiorne Point State Park at 05:10 and



started imitating a screech-owl. Given the snow the day before, there wasn’t much room to pull over, but we had a secret weapon – the use of our friend Zeke’s ginormous white pickup truck with extended cab and plenty of room in the bed for scopes and such. Would the “Zekemobile” allow us to roll over the competition? Or “keep on truckin’” when other teams were buried? Stay tuned to find out...

It didn’t help with owls through, and we were shut out at traditional spots for both screech and Great Horned. By dawn we’d made it down the southern edge of Rye (remember – our team has a tradition of birding only within our namesake town on the Superbowl), where we figured we’d try for songbirds in areas we don’t usually get to until the afternoon. At the back side of Eel Pond, we were off to a good start with our only Northern Flicker of the day, as well as a great look at a Cooper’s Hawk (our first in four years). Actually, it turned out to be a great day for hawks, with lots more Cooper’s, and Red-tails seemingly every time we turned around – plus a surprise to be named later. There was no time for dawdling over hawks and flickers however, and we were off.



Male Northern Flicker on the Superbowl.  
Photo by Pam Hunt.

Cutting back to the coast, we did some quick scans from a couple of ocean viewing spots on our way to Rye Harbor (we planned to check the coast more carefully in the afternoon), and in the process picked up many of the expected seabirds and waterfowl. For the second winter in a row, a

Snowy Owl has taken up residence at Rye Harbor, but once we saw it perched on the restroom roof we paid it no mind at all, which we're sure completely confused the mass of photographers that had gathered. Why on earth were these four women with scopes looking everywhere BUT the restroom roof? Those birders sure are weird! After a kingfisher and Great Blue Heron, but no staked-out Savannah Sparrow, we were back inland, and by 09:00 were not too far from where we started at dawn. There is a nice feeder along Perkins Road in Rye: it has a stream nearby and a big thicket behind it, and is a great place for something interesting. We heard a Carolina Wren (first of several), ticked the local Red-winged Blackbirds, but were NOT prepared for one of the surprises of the day when a GRAY CATBIRD popped out of a bush and checked out a suet feeder. A four point bird – and a new species for the overall historical Twitchers' list.

**--- We interrupt this narrative to bring you breaking news from outside the town of Rye. ---**  
**--- There's a Gyrfalcon in Hampton Harbor, and it's happily feeding on a Herring Gull. ---**

Yes, you heard that correctly (you DID hear it, right? I'm not going crazy or anything?). We knew there'd been a "Gyr" around, and had agreed that if it was found during the Superbowl we'd temporarily abandon Rye to go and see it. So we did. As did another 20 or more birders including several other Superbowl teams. This was a "state bird" for Pam Becky, and Andrea, and a LIFER for Pat (we forgot to tell her she owes us a beer...), so it was well worth the mere 40 minutes it took for us to go down, see the beast, and return to Rye.



Gyrfalcon at Hampton Harbor flats (it was a quarter mile away). Photo by Pam Hunt.

We reentered Rye at 10:00 and worked our way up the interior of Rye to Odiorne Point. Odiorne was pretty much a bust, and we spent an hour finding only a handful of Razorbills at the mouth of Little Harbor. We also failed to find the local screech-owl either before or after our exploration of the park. It was now after noon, we had only four hours left to bird, and we still wanted to do a little more inland birding before hitting the coast at the end. But first, a stop at Concord Point for the female Harlequin Duck. While this attractive little species can be common to the north and south, it is actually fairly rare in New Hampshire, so we were happy to have this one staked out right here in "our" town! Of course, we couldn't find it.

Just south of Concord Point is Highland Park Ave., a little dead end that has a nice mix of habitats and feeders. On the Coastal Christmas Bird Count in mid-December, Becky and I had Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and Swamp Sparrow here, and while we failed to find any of these, an excellent consolation prize was another 4-pointer: a Winter Wren! Over the years, we've had good luck in Central Cemetery in Rye (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Pine Warbler), so we couldn't pass it up on our way south. Luckily it had been plowed so we drove in and – back in the corner where we find rarities – hit pay dirt when an immature Red-shouldered Hawk flew across the road. This 4-pointer (our

third) was especially appreciated since a bird scouted the weekend before at the old Rye airstrip could not be found earlier in the day (when a snow squall didn't help any). Our final inland stop was along Love Lane, where we hoped for things like nuthatch, creeper, and kinglet, but instead found a Hermit Thrush. There have been a lot of these in New Hampshire this winter, so I was particularly happy to find one on the Superbowl.

So now it was 15:00, and we hit the coast a final time. There were quite a few things we could still find, but the ocean was generally quiet, as if the birds were punching the clock and going home early on a Sunday evening. But we had a nice high point back at Concord Point, where Becky found the Harlequin Duck, but she and I were unable to get either Pat or Andrea on a distant Red-throated Loon in the choppy seas. Somewhere around 16:00, as we approached Seal Rocks, I spotted a Peregrine Falcon flying south for what turned out to be our last bird of the day. A few more scans of the darkening Atlantic failed to turn up any guillemots, shorebirds, unusual gulls, or shorebirds, and we needed to turn around and head to Newburyport for the Superbowl wrap-up gathering.

One important Superbowl rule is that teams must report to the wrap-up by 17:30 or suffer penalties, and having dawdled a little longer than ideal in our futile search for Red-throated Loon, we suspected we'd be cutting it close. But Becky handled the Zekemobile expertly, slowing down for police cars as needed, and we made it with seven minutes to spare. Our totals ended up at 59 species and 100 points, both right around our average.

Would we have done better if we hadn't walked around Odiorne? Maybe – or maybe we'd not have Razorbill? Would we have done better if we hadn't gone after the Gyr Falcon? Maybe, but who wants to miss a GYRFALCON?! The real point, after all, was to have fun without freezing to death, a task we accomplished quite successfully. And as an extra bonus, we broke \$2,000 in pledges (for the first time) in support for *New Hampshire Bird Records* and NH eBird. Thanks to everyone who pledged.

Good Birding!

Pam Hunt (aka "Fearless Leader"), for the "Twitchers in the Rye"



Twitchers in the Rye (L to R: Pam Hunt, Andrea Robbins, Pat Myers, and Becky Suomala) and the trusty Zekemobile. Driving out of the sunset?!

The list:

Canada Goose	Belted Kingfisher	White-breasted Nuthatch
American Black Duck	Red-shouldered Hawk *	Winter Wren *
Mallard	Red-tailed Hawk	Carolina Wren
Common Eider	Ring-billed Gull	Eastern Bluebird
Harlequin Duck *	Herring Gull	Hermit Thrush
Surf Scoter	Great Black-backed Gull	American Robin
White-winged Scoter	Razorbill	Gray Catbird *
Black Scoter	Rock Pigeon	Northern Mockingbird
Long-tailed Duck	Mourning Dove	European Starling
Bufflehead	Snowy Owl	American Tree Sparrow
Common Goldeneye	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Hooded Merganser	Downy Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Hairy Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Common Loon	Northern Flicker	Northern Cardinal
Horned Grebe	Peregrine Falcon *	Red-winged Blackbird
Red-necked Grebe	Blue Jay	House Finch
Great Cormorant	American Crow	Pine Siskin
Great Blue Heron	Horned Lark	American Goldfinch
Bald Eagle	Black-capped Chickadee	House Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk	Tufted Titmouse	

\* species seen for the first time by the Twitchers