

Twitchers in the *Semi-Superbowl of Birding* 2021

The Big Picture - Twitchers Win Two Awards!

by Becky Suomala

This was the year that the Townie Award really took off in the Superbowl of Birding. Ten of the 21 teams in the competition were competing for the Townie Award. Usually there's only one – the Twitchers! It wasn't always an award category but it's what the Twitchers have been doing since we started in 2009 – searching for the most species in a single town. In 2021 some changes had to be made due to COVID-19 (hence the name change to Semi-Superbowl). The competition still involved looking for as many bird species as possible in 12 hours and was run by Massachusetts Audubon's Joppa Flats Education Center. Teams could compete in Essex County, MA and/or Rockingham County, NH providing they followed state quarantine rules. But this year, team members had to be people in your "bubble" and the rules were changed to allow teams of 1-7 people. This meant the "Twitchers" had to split up and we ended up with three teams in three different towns.

The Twitcher teams:

"Birding with Impunity" in Rye, Pam Hunt and Unity Dienes

"Townie Solitaire" (aka The Lone Twitcher) in Seabrook, Becky Suomala

"Twitch-n-Dip" in Hampton, Susan Wrisley and Jenna Pettipas

It was great to have so much competition this year. There were fewer teams competing for the entire competition and county awards, which ultimately benefited the New Hampshire townies (a team can only win one award). Massachusetts teams had some pretty impressive totals and took home top honors.



"Birding with Impunity" finally spotted this Semipalmated Plover that had been spending the winter at Rye Harbor. It was a first for the Twitchers and a 5-point species (with the 3-pt. bonus). Photo by Pam Hunt



One of the "Townie Solitaire's" four species of owls – the Snowy Owl flew from Seabrook to Hampton so "Twitch-n-Dip" also got to see it. Photo by Susan Wrisley.

We all had a great day on January 30, 2021. "Birding with Impunity" in Rye took home the coveted Rockingham County Award and the "Townie Solitaire" won the Townie Award in Seabrook. Wow! The three Twitcher teams combined to tally 83 species, six of which were new for the Twitchers, and four of which were 5-pointers. (Each species has a point value with the rare species worth more points than common ones.) Five-pointers, the rarest, must be called in and if you're the first to call in that species you receive a 3-point bonus (we collected on three of those).

You'll notice that the temperature is a common thread in the team highlights below – it was pretty chilly, but we all had a great time despite the cold. "Birding with Impunity" had three five-point species, the "Townie Solitaire" was thrilled to find four owl

species, and “Twitch-n-Dip” added two new species for the Twitchers as well as providing some creative photo fun. We hope you enjoy our adventures below.

Thank you to everyone who sponsored the Twitchers, whether you pledged an individual team or the collective effort. Pledges are still coming in so we don’t have a final tally yet, but we could break \$5,000 (a new record). We had some creative and fun pledges, including a warm pair of socks and a bonus if we got pooped on by a bird (which we of course documented with photos). There were several complex pledges that required the table below and the color-coded spreadsheet of results at the end of this document. We did well with bonuses for owls and 5-pointers, but were weak on warblers. One particular pledge involved so many bonuses that the donor had to figure the final tally, with “Birding with Impunity” receiving the most. All money raised goes to support two NH Audubon programs, *New Hampshire Bird Records* and NHeBird.



One person pledged a bonus if we saw an Ostrich and we knew we’d have to provide documentation. You just never know what we’ll find! Photo by Susan Wisley.

| The Twitcher Numbers | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Team | Twitch-n-Dip | Birding with Impunity | The Townie Solitaire | Combined Total |
| Town | Hampton | Rye | Seabrook | (3 towns) |
| total species: | 58 | 63 | 64 | 83 |
| total points: | 96 | 121 | 118 | 184 |
| Species seen by all teams | | | | 43 |
| 5-pointers | | 3 | 1 | |
| Unique species | 3 | 12 | 8 | 23 |
| New species | 2 | 3 | 2 | 6* |
| * two teams both got the same new species | | | | |

Birding with Impunity Takes Home the Rockingham County Award!

by Pam Hunt

I “retired” from the Superbowl of Birding in 2017, but given a few COVID-related changes I was back in the fray in 2021. The big difference was that teams didn’t need to be at least four people – COVID dontcha know – and so Unity and I formed “Birding with Impunity” and returned to my old “Twitchers” stomping grounds of Rye. As an aside, I’m not sure why the organizers have been adding the “semi” before “Superbowl” this winter. It was certainly no less work than usual, and while teams were obviously smaller, we still had to deal with sometimes inhospitable January weather. In fact, with wind chills taken into account, this was the second coldest any Twitcher team has been in eleven years. Thankfully the winds weren’t all that bad (generally less than 10 mph), but it was certainly a cold day. Range was 7-19 F, with wind chills from -5 to a positively balmy 7 degrees.

In the end, we had an absolutely fabulous day, starting with Great Horned and Northern Saw-whet Owls on Bracket Road around 5:45 am and ending – with three minutes to spare – with a mid-distant look at a Common Murre (5-pointer) off Odiorne Point. In between we had a couple of great staked out birds: the Rye Harbor Semipalmated Plover (another 5-pointer) and West Road Black-throated Blue Warbler (our third 5-pointer, which gave a **very** brief view), but missed out on the Lincoln’s Sparrow that had been at Odiorne Point State Park despite some pretty extensive searching. As the first (and actually only) team to call in the plover and warbler, we were awarded an additional three points each.



Surf Scoter by Unity Dienes.

Other usually common species were strangely scarce, and in the end we only found a couple of each of reliable birds like Great Black-backed Gull, Great Cormorant, and American Tree Sparrow. Two major “saves” came late in the day, with our **only** pigeon at Rye Harbor around 3:00 pm (and only because we lingered to take photos of nearby ducks and loons!) – Whew! One pledge was a 5-point deduction if any Twitcher team missed pigeon (and it has been missed in Rye). Our second save was a pair of mockingbirds near Wallis Sands as we drove north along Rt. 1A at 4:20 pm.

Pileated Woodpeckers, a species the Twitchers only had three times in 10 years in Rye, were seemingly everywhere, with I think five birds at four sites almost in a row. Other reasonably good finds were a pair of Northern Pintail in the marsh near the Odiorne Point State Park boat launch (aka the “old wooden bridge” – long since de-woodified), the female Barrow’s Goldeneye at Seal Rocks, and Brown Creepers and a Golden-crowned Kinglet at the Rye Conservation property known as “Seavey Acres” off of Route 1A)

Our total species list was 63 (plus a Pam-only Razorbill), which ties the previous Twitchers’ Rye record, and we beat the old points record of 112 with a nice solid 121. The latter was enough to win us the “Rockingham Rocks” award for the most points in the county. Although this year that prize only comes with bragging rights, we’ll happily rest on our laurels as the “team to beat” in 2022 (when I can’t promise I’ll be competing!)

Twitch-n-Dip in Hampton by Susan Wisley

Jenna Pettipas and I formed team Twitch-n-Dip and covered Hampton, NH – a town the Twitchers had competed in for the last two years. We stayed at a hotel in Hampton and woke up promptly at 4:15 am...then hit the snooze button and got up less promptly at 4:20 am. After struggling into 20 layers of warm clothing we were toasty warm and headed off to our first owling location. The warmth lasted for about 30 seconds in the frigid 7 degree F temps, but we were rewarded with a Northern Saw-whet Owl at our second stop, and two Eastern Screech-Owls at our final owling spot. Despite hooting efforts that were



Susan Wisley seawatching at Bicentennial Park in Hampton. Photo by Jenna Pettipas.

good enough to upset some small farm animals (all were safe in barns), we dipped on both Barred and Great Horned Owls, but did have a nice look at two coyotes.

As we prepared to switch from owls to feeder birds (7:00 am), we had our first-of-the-day, official “I’m freezing my butt off” whine, quickly followed by “Let’s pish from the car,” “I’m not getting out,” and “We need more hot coffee!” I expected this to happen much earlier, so I’m proud of us!

After a quick detour to Dunkin’ Donuts, we collected a nice variety of feeder birds and a few raptors, but never found either of the two scouted Red-shouldered Hawks, nor the two scouted Pileated Woodpeckers, or any of the three scouted flickers. Where did they all go? We also dipped on our scouted Northern Pintail, and what we thought was a sure-thing Carolina Wren. Thank goodness Holly Bauer’s yard provided us with a back-up wren. (Thank you Holly for allowing us to bird your yard!) As we drove toward the coastline the Hampton water tower came into view and we began lamenting how everyone says Peregrine Falcons are “always” on the water tower, but we never see them there. Just as we finished griping a Peregrine came soaring in and landed on the water tower! Wow!

At the coast we quickly collected the standard gulls, all the scoters and most other expected ducks. Surprisingly, Hampton Harbor was completely devoid of Buffleheads and Red-breasted Mergansers even though we checked three times. Not surprisingly, Canada Geese were also scarce. We later found Red-breasted Mergansers, and surprisingly had Hooded Mergansers in two locations! Big waves and rough seas dashed our hopes of finding alcids, but we did manage to turn up a single Horned Grebe.



“Twitch-n-Dip” – Susan Wrisley and Jenna Pettipas with friends.

At the Hampton/Seabrook town line “Glaucy,” the resident Glaucous Gull, didn’t disappoint and we had nice views of him on top of a siren. We also had a confirmed sighting of Becky Suomala who was superbowling in Seabrook. By then temps were so cold we weren’t entirely surprised when we spotted a couple of penguins. Unfortunately, they waddled across the town line into Seabrook so we had to hand them off to Becky. Rumor has it some shenanigans may have taken place, but I don’t believe it.

By 3:30 pm we had given up on Buffleheads and Canada Geese, when lo-and-behold, we found Canadas in the Hampton saltmarsh and a lone female Buffle in one of the pools! A Merlin was another great addition, as was the Snowy Owl found by Becky.

By 4:35 we were down to the wire and racing to North Shore Road (if you can call 30 mph racing) in the hopes of finding our missing flock of scouted Red-winged Blackbirds. I noticed birds flying as I drove along Rt. 1A, then suddenly realized those were our blackbirds! A quick u-turn and some searching turned up a dozen Red-winged Blackbirds, along with some wary looking dog walkers who clearly thought we were nuts. They may be right.

It was a cold, but fun day! We finished with 58 species, just two short of my predicted 60.



Twitcher High Jinks! Becky Suomala (left), the “Townie Solitaire” in frigid Antarctic Seabrook adding the newly discovered “Hampton-Seabrook Penguin” to her list after “Twitch-n-Dip” in Hampton (right, Jenna Pettipas) first spotted them. Photos by Susan Wisley.

Townie Solitaire in Seabrook by Rebecca Suomala

I had a great day despite the 3:20 am wake-up call and the 8 degree starting temperature. Any four-owl day is a good one, especially on the Superbowl of Birding. When the Twitchers had to split up because of COVID, we each took a town and I had Seabrook on my own – the Lone Twitcher!

My first bird of the morning was a Great Horned Owl at my first owling stop. The wind was much lighter than I expected and I coaxed out a Barred Owl “Whoo-Ah” a few stops later. My fantastic-looking final owl spot turned out to be a dud, but it was great for songbirds at dawn, yielding my only 5-pointer – a Red Crossbill flying over. A second flew over as I was calling in the first one. I was only the second caller of the morning, according to a sleepy David Moon, and I got the 3-point bonus. The excitement warmed up everything except my feet which were blocks of ice for a while. The rest of me was warm in my two hats, two neck warmers, two coats, five top layers and three leg layers! It was not easy to make a rest stop! (Actually, that’s often my typical winter attire but this morning I had the warmest versions of all those layers.)



Red-shouldered Hawk at Lowe’s, Seabrook, by Rebecca Suomala.

My dawn stop gave me most of the woodland birds so I headed to the busy Rt. 1 area to try for some birds along the strip and then to the coast for high tide. I was happy to find a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks sitting in the same tree in front of Lowe’s and a Swamp Sparrow at Home Depot. I was lucky to find one lone Canada Goose (my only one) on a pond that had frozen since my scouting. The adult Glaucous Gull was in its usual spot at the Seabrook restrooms on Hampton Harbor. I met Susan and Jenna

there who were on their way back from the tiny part of Hampton that gives a view of the restrooms and the gull. We had great fun taking some photos for sponsors.

On a second visit to the strip in search of raven (a scouted bird I didn't find) I heard a Fish Crow while stuck in traffic on Rt. 1 (consolation for the probable Turkey Vulture I missed due to the traffic)! Most of the birds I had during the day were the common 1- or 2-pointers but I had a few surprises – Belted Kingfisher (creeks had frozen up), Hermit Thrush, Savannah Sparrow, and Snow Bunting (easy in Hampton, harder in Seabrook).

My third owl came in the afternoon. I was pishing at some open water and finding nothing new when I finally noticed the Blue Jays and chickadees making alarm noises behind me. I turned around to see them clustered by a hole in a tree, with a chickadee actually looking inside the hole. I figured there had to be an owl but despite my increasing pishing, nothing appeared. I returned two hours later to check again and there it was, an Eastern Screech-Owl looking out at me.



Eastern Screech-Owl by Rebecca Suomala.

On a late afternoon check of Seabrook Beach, I found my fourth owl. I caught a quick glimpse of a large white bird as it flew by me between the houses in Seabrook headed to Hampton. I was sure it was a Snowy Owl but I needed confirmation. I tracked it down a block away just over the town line in an evergreen. Owl #4! Twitch-n-Dip was able to get a stunning photo and add it to their tally also.

Given the big waves on Seabrook Beach, finding seabirds was a challenge. It was a very high tide and the waves were rolling over the jetty so I was lucky to get Purple Sandpipers. My only alcid was a Razorbill flyby. I missed Red-throated Loon and Great Cormorant. I almost missed Great Black-backed Gull (where were they? – I finally found just one in Hampton Harbor!) and bluebird (they were everywhere when I scouted). My nemesis bird was Brown Creeper which I had every time I scouted but couldn't find on the big day.

My last species of the day was Northern Harrier at Cross Beach Road where I was hoping for owl #5 (Short-eared), but the harrier was a treat at sunset. I had a small group of shorebirds fly over the saltmarsh at sunset, likely Dunlin, but they were only silhouettes and I really couldn't count them based on what was most likely. I ended with a total of 64 species and 118 points.

How was it being a team of one? I still enjoyed the competition day immensely and had a very fun time. A second set of eyes would have been wonderful at times. I might have gotten that Turkey Vulture if someone else had been able to put binoculars on it while I drove. I was so glad to meet up with Susan and Jenna at Hampton Harbor and have some fun with photos. It was great to have a laugh with fellow Twitchers. After the competition, we zoomed together with other New Hampshire competitors on Sunday before the compilation so I got to share stories that way. I found scouting to be dull by myself, especially in a new town with lots of logistics to work out. I'm grateful to Andrea and George Robbins who spent a day scouting Seabrook and are responsible for my one 5-pointer with the bonus.

It was great fun to have lots of people competing for the Townie Award this year. A big thank you to everyone who sponsored the Twitchers. As a team of one, I especial appreciated it during the scouting and anticipation of a very cold day ("Why am I doing this?" :-).

Twitcher Teams - Semi-Superbowl of Birding Results 2021

orange = new for Twitchers

green = seen by all teams

yellow = seen by just one team

number of points for that species

| All-time Twitcher Species List | Hampton | Rye | Seabrook | All Teams |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----|----------|-----------|
| Canada Goose | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mallard | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| American Black Duck | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Northern Pintail | | 3 | | 3 |
| Common Eider | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Surf Scoter | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| White-winged Scoter | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Black Scoter | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Long-tailed Duck | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Bufflehead | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Common Goldeneye | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | | 3 | | 3 |
| Hooded Merganser | 2 | 2 | | 2 |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Horned Grebe | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Red-necked Grebe | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Rock Pigeon | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Mourning Dove | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Semipalmated Plover* | | 5 | | 5 |
| Sanderling | 3 | 3 | | 3 |
| Purple Sandpiper | | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Common Murre | | 5 | | 5 |
| Razorbill | | | 3 | 3 |
| Black Guillemot | | 2 | | 2 |
| Ring-billed Gull | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Herring Gull | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Iceland Gull | | | 2 | 2 |
| Glaucous Gull | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| Great Black-backed Gull | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Red-throated Loon | | 2 | | 2 |
| Common Loon | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Great Cormorant | | 1 | | 1 |
| Northern Harrier | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | | 3 | | 3 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Bald Eagle | 2 | | 2 | 2 |
| Red-shouldered Hawk | | | 4 | 4 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Eastern Screech-Owl | 2 | | 2 | 2 |
| Great Horned Owl | | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Snowy Owl | 3 | | 3 | 3 |

| All-time Twitcher Species List | Hampton | Rye | Seabrook | All Teams |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Barred Owl | | | 3 | 3 |
| Northern Saw-whet Owl | 4 | 4 | | 4 |
| Belted Kingfisher | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Downy Woodpecker | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Northern Flicker | | | 3 | 3 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Merlin | 4 | | | 4 |
| Peregrine Falcon | 3 | | | 3 |
| Blue Jay | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| American Crow | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Fish Crow | | | 4 | 4 |
| Common Raven | | 4 | | 4 |
| Horned Lark | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Tufted Titmouse | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Brown Creeper | 3 | 3 | | 3 |
| Carolina Wren | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Golden-crowned Kinglet | | 2 | | 2 |
| Eastern Bluebird | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Hermit Thrush | | | 3 | 3 |
| American Robin | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Northern Mockingbird | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| European Starling | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| House Sparrow | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| House Finch | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Common Redpoll | | 3 | | 3 |
| Red Crossbill* | | | 5 | 5 |
| American Goldfinch | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Snow Bunting | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| American Tree Sparrow | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Dark-eyed Junco | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| White-throated Sparrow | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Savannah Sparrow | 3 | | 3 | 3 |
| Song Sparrow | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Swamp Sparrow | | | 3 | 3 |
| Red-winged Blackbird | 3 | | | 3 |
| Black-throated Blue Warbler* | | 5 | | 5 |
| Northern Cardinal | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| total species: | 59 | 64 | 65 | 84 |
| total points: | 96 | 121 | 118 | 184 |
| * = 3 pt. bonus | | (6 bonus pts.) | (3 bonus pts.) | (9 bonus pts.) |

Photo Gallery from the Twitchers, Jan. 20, 2021



Peregrine Falcon by Susan Wisley.



Waves on Seabrook Beach by Rebecca Suomala.



Above:
Common Loon with a crab by Unity Dienes.

Documentation for a pledge of our Crested Caracara in Seabrook. For some reason the record was not accepted!



Jenna talking to the penguins by Susan Wisley.



Snow Buntings by Rebecca Suomala.