

BIRDFINDING IN CANADA

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STATISTICAE CANADENSIS

Maybe because of last issue's rather lengthy provincial life lists, one of our subscribers, Birdie Lister from Rising Falls, P.E.I., sent in this bit of doggerel.

"Birdwatching is really some race,"

Said Kay as she made a wry face.

"Though my list is now numbered

Well over three hundred,

I've just dropped to eighty-eighth place."

Well, Kay, don't worry too much about it. The statistical side of birding is just one more dimension to the sport and adds a lot of enjoyment for a lot of people. Some do it. Some don't. Personally, we encourage it.

Contrary to what its detractors may say, the list-keeping phase of birding greatly enhances one's knowledge of birds, their plumages and their habits. Show us the birders with the largest life lists for any given area and they will almost surely be the ones who know most about birds - how to identify them, their songs, migration schedules, habitats, and many other facts. They have to. That's how they keep adding more birds.

From our experience it appears that 20 to 25% of our subscribers enjoy some phase or phases of the numbers games. That is why we make sure that (a) we save space for statistics in every issue and (b) at the same time, limit that space to a fraction proportionate to its popularity.

One of the most popular phases of birding statistics is keeping the "year's list." This type of avian-oriented exercise provides a great tonic for keeping one's interest up all year. It also has a built-in panacea to soothe the birder's feelings when a bird is missed. Unless it's Dec. 31st, there's always tomorrow! It has a much more long-range-low-key concept than the "big day" objective.

There have been some remarkable "year's lists by provinces" achieved in the past few years. Two of the most interesting have been by David Stirling, Victoria, B.C. and Alan Wormington of Leamington, Ontario. In 1979, David observed 319 species of birds within the boundaries of British Columbia. This became a "four-minute-mile" type of standard among many Canadian birders. Would it ever be beaten or tied? Only 2 provinces have a total of 400 species on their checklists so it was logical that they would be the arenas where such competitions must occur. They are British Columbia and Ontario. In 1981, Al Wormington, concentrating on every accessible variety of range and habitat, totalled 320 species in Ontario.

This "win by an eyelash" gave Al the lead over David for only one year. By the end of 1982, full species status had been given to the red-breasted sapsucker, a bird which Stirling had observed in his record year. So, each now stands at 320.

We recently asked both Al and David about their plans to attempt to win back sole claim to the record. Both have such ideas in the back of their minds. But an assault on this type of record is not something one does on the spur of the moment. It takes a lot of advance planning. Optimum times to be here and there for certain species have to be resolved. Travel, vacation schedules, assistance from others all have to be worked out well ahead. Many uncontrollable variables cause quick adjustments after the year is started. These can be bad weather, illness, travel foul-ups and bad luck. So, alternate plans have to be on call.

David Stirling says, "I am going to try to beat the 320 provincial total - but not this year. I think 325 is certainly possible in British Columbia but it would require lots of organization and hard work. Just now, I haven't the time - not in '83 anyway."

Alan's answer was about the same as David's.

For a closer look at yearly lists by provinces and territories let's express absolute numbers of species observed as a percentage of the totals on each of the respective checklists. Applying this index, 320 equates to 80% of the Ontario potential and 78% of B.C.'s. In this context, Roger Burrows of Glovertown, Nfld. becomes a prime competitor. In 1975, Roger listed 208 species in P.E.I. which also has an 80% "potential index."

Using this measurement, here are the highest ratios of which we're aware as of March 25, 1983.

Alan Wormington	- Ontario	1981	80%	Hue MacKenzie	-Ontario	1981	72%
Roger Burrows	- P.E.I.	1975	80	Al McTavish	-Ontario	1980	72
David Stirling	- B.Columbia	1979	78	Don Sutherland	-Ontario	1979	72
Allen Wiseley	- Alberta	1978	76	Gerry Bennett	-Ontario	1980	72
Norm Chesterfield	- Ontario	1973	75	Rob Walker	-Manitoba	1974	71
Bruce Mactavish	- Nova Scotia	1974	73	Ray Williams	- B.C.	1981	70
Jo Ann Murray	- Ontario	1981	73	Geoff Carpentier	-Ontario	1982	70
Chris Adam	- Saskatchewan	1980	72	John Keenleyside	-Ontario	1982	70
Dave Fidler	- Ontario	1981	72	Lou Marsh	-Ontario	1973	70

Others with 65% or more include: British Columbia - Richard Cannings; Alberta - Eric Tull; Saskatchewan - Chris Escott, Stan Shadick, Guy Wapple; N.W.T. - Alan Wormington; Ontario - Hugh Currie, Barry Jones, Kevin McLaughlin, Alex Gray; Newfoundland - Bruce Mactavish.

Applying yet one more dimension - that of time - we find another statistic that may be the most difficult of all to surpass. In 1980, in Yukon, Mike Bentley listed 124 species, or 60% of total potential, in just 6 weeks! That is less than 12% of the year. Has anyone else done that? Let us know.

Just one more provincial mark. Alan Wormington has observed 300 or more species in Ontario in 4 different years and just missed in 1982 with 298.

Now for some location life lists. David Christie has observed 199 species in Fundy National Park, N.B. This is 81% of the checklist or 87% if 13 species which he considers hypothetical were removed.

In the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, Dan Brunton has had 182 species and David Stirling 208. However, these fall short of Richard Cannings' life total of 253. Richard's boundaries are: the Okanagan watershed plus Similkameen Valley south of Keremeos.

Here are some more National Park life lists: Blake Maybank, Gros Morne, Nfld. - 131 and Prince Albert, Sask. - 176; Dan Brunton - Banff - 161.

Three more of David Stirling's life numbers may be of interest to those who keep records for the same areas. They are: Vancouver Island - 285; within the city of Victoria - 279; Athabasca area - 195.

The above reflects only some of the many personal statistics that many of our subscribers maintain, all of which we find of great interest. Too bad we haven't space to print them all. A new questionnaire is included with this issue. If you intend to file, it is most important that we receive yours by May 25th. Deadlines are getting stricter all the time. In the world of printing (and maybe others) it seems the more refinements and improvements implemented, the longer it takes to get anything done.

BIRDFINDING IN CANADA is published six times a year by G.Bennett, R.R.# 2, 10780 Pine Valley Drive, Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada. L4L 1A6. Business address is P.O.Box 519, Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada. L0J 1C0.

All articles are prepared and written by G.Bennett unless indicated otherwise.

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