

WE TRIED

The evening of Friday, June 24, was very windy. The big flag by the YMCA was blowing straight out. We left town around 9PM, excited to be on our way to camp just off the Deep Creek Pass Road (HWY 12 to White Sulphur) in anticipation of the next day's birdathon. In good spirits we picked up a few species on our way. An Osprey was standing on the lee side of its nest platform where it was sheltered from the wind. By our 5th or 6th robin along the highway, we were kidding around with comments like "we already saw you, so buzz off dude". And when fooled by a supposed black bird by the side of the road we dubbed it an "American Black Plastic Bag".

The next morning we started birding at 5:15. It was cloudy and the wind was howling, but the sunrise through the clouds was spectacular. We strolled around the campground at the pass hoping to hear an owl hooting or grouse drumming and some bird song. Nothing. The lake on the other side of the pass was roiling with white caps and the wind kept the sparrows low. Three hours later we had garnered ten species. We uttered many discouraging words.

Off to the south end of Canyon Ferry Lake ... Pond 2 to be exact. We lucked out! The wind was not so strong to be unpleasant but strong enough to keep the mosquitoes at bay. It was cloudy and cool. The light, when the sun did shine, was perfect. And – to top it off – the pond was full of water. (In the past the water had been so low that the birds were far away). The birding was great and we easily compiled 27 species. YES!

Up the east side of Canyon Ferry, on the way to Hellgate Canyon, a Whitetail doe and her small fawn crossed the highway. The landscape was the greenest we have ever seen. About 20 Pronghorn sauntered up the road cut. One of the bucks had impressive larger black horns. Hellgate Gulch was delightful ... the creek was flowing and birds were singing from streamside shrubs. The canyon itself with its towering limestone cliffs has an intimate but majestic feel. The birds included breath-taking Lazuli Buntings glowing turquoise in the sunlight and White Throated Swifts.

Cave Gulch was also a delight, the short layered cliffs an interesting and still scenic contrast to Hellgate. Birding was fun, with several new species including a quiet Rock Wren.

We found a FEW more birds even at the Regulating Reservoir with its white capped waves. Then home for naps and dinner. Afterwards we eked out several species up Grizzly Gulch, the Fairgrounds Pond and Spring Meadow. It was a trying day, but some spots were fun and exciting.

Thank you for your pledges. Our chapter is becoming more involved in the community and supporting more good causes. This year we awarded the first LCAS scholarship to a deserving high school senior, donated bird books to school libraries and helped fund the expansion of the Charles Van Hook wetlands. Your contributions are invaluable for projects like these. They also give us a reason to get out and bird for a day! Thanks again. Please make checks out to LCAS or Last Chance Audubon and mail to Bigfoot and Baldy, 940 Wilder Ave, Helena MT 59601.