

The Cardinal Sins struggle through birdathon

I never thought I would complain about perfect weather, but here it goes. One day each spring, my birdathon team known as The Cardinal Sins takes on a mission to find as many different bird species as possible in 24 hours. OK, 20 hours. We're wusses. The team is accustomed to rain.

In 20 years, we've seen more rain than Noah.

But not this year. May 26 was a sunny, beautiful day, neither cold in the predawn darkness nor unreasonably windy later. It was perfect. Naturally, we had our worst score in years.

2:15 a.m.: Our foursome assembles in Old Town, already 15 minutes behind schedule because of an incorrectly set alarm. By 2:45 A.M., we have our first bird of the day — a whippoorwill on the Stud Mill Road in Milford. Minutes later, I have my first mosquito bite.

3:45 a.m.: We need an owl. The Sunkhaze Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is infested with northern saw-whet, barred and great horned owls, but we've been searching for an hour and have not heard one. The whole point of starting a birdathon in the dead of night is to find owls. We are getting skunked. Shortly after 4 a.m., a barred owl takes pity on us and calls weakly in the distance. But by this time, the horizon is brightening and the warblers are singing. We are in trouble, and the sun isn't even up yet.

4:30 a.m.: The score is 23 birds and four arguments. Arguing

about route and timetable is kind of our thing. We need a Swainson's thrush. They like singing early, but we've heard none. It turns out, they were late migrating this year. It would be another week before I would hear one.

8 a.m.: We are up to 63 species — not bad but not good. We are getting many of the expected birds, but we are missing some uncommon birds we commonly find, and we are missing a few rarer birds known to be in the places we are looking. We head to Bangor City Forest, desperately needing to find six new birds for the day's list. We find three. The Canada warbler, Lincoln's sparrow and northern waterthrush are right where they are supposed to be, but six other likely birds are missing. Sullenly, we head for Essex Woods in Bangor.

11:30 a.m.: Jackpot. At Essex Woods we get most of our target birds effortlessly. Sora and Virginia rails are in a calling contest when we arrive, easily heard over the highway noise. Northern rough-winged swallows can be tricky, but a pair buzz us. We've missed Baltimore oriole before, but not this time. The most exciting discovery is a trio of short-billed dowitchers loafing on a log — the first I've ever seen there. Things are looking up.

Then — down again. We miss green heron, hooded merganser and willow flycatcher. We want to have a hundred species by noon but we are stuck at 83. By 1 p.m. a turkey vulture is only enough to get us to 90, as we turn toward the coast.

2 p.m.: We get lucky in Steuben. Through a spotting scope, we spy a mixed flock of least and semipalmated sandpipers. Black-bellied



BOB DUCHESNE
The Cardinal Sins had a frustrating birdathon, but did manage to spot more than 100 species, including buffleheads.

plovers roost on a distant rock. A pair of lingering buffleheads paddle aimlessly in the bay. Over the next half-hour, we add common tern, surf scoter and a pair of lingering long-tailed ducks. Most buffleheads and long-tailed ducks have flown north by now.

2:30 p.m.: We finally reach a hundred species — a feat we had achieved by noon the year before.

5:30 p.m.: We throw away whatever shred of a plan we have left and stay a little bit longer on the coast. Our original scheme would

have taken us into deeper woods to look for forest species, but we are too late. The best we can do is circle back toward Bangor in hopes of grabbing some birds we've missed earlier. We scoop up wood duck, ring-necked duck and pied-billed grebe along the way, but by 6 p.m. we are only at 114 species.

7 p.m.: We snag white-breasted nuthatch and eastern bluebird at Fields Pond Audubon Center but miss pine siskin and scarlet tanager.

8:42 p.m.: We're in total darkness behind the BAM bookstore at the

Bangor Mall. A bird calls "WHIT." I ponder a moment and turn to the group. "Do you know what makes a 'WHIT' call note like that? A willow flycatcher." Whereupon it sings and removes all doubt. We end the day at a measly 117 species.

Bob Duchesne serves as vice president of Maine Audubon's Penobscot Valley Chapter. He developed the Maine Birding Trail, with information at mainebirdingtrail.com. He can be reached at duchesne@midmaine.com.

Moving with bees is special challenge

Many of my students and bee supplies customers have been aware of the long drawn-out process of my house move.

With our boys grown and flown the nest, it's been time for Anne and me to downsize the house. Of course, while our need for bedrooms has reduced, my need for bee hive and barn space has grown. I also wanted the new house to be in a location more conducive to running a bee supply business while ideally still being in Hampden.

We found the perfect house last summer at 236 Main Road South, an old 1860s farmhouse with 5 acres and a huge, newly built, insulated and heated barn. It took a while to find a buyer for our house who didn't already have a house they needed to sell. Once we did get one, they wanted the closing to be May 27, just about the busiest time of year for a beekeeper!

In the weeks preceding the move, I relocated dozens of hives from my house on Town Farm Road to other locations in Hampden and Carmel. It was going to be busy enough as it was without moving bees that week, too. We were able to move my beekeeping equipment stock and our household goods into the barn in the week before closing. My used, empty, nuc boxes, supers and swarm traps were stacked up behind the barn.

The day before moving into the house I noticed that this equipment was generating some interest from the local bee population. There



PETER COWIN

Peter Cowin, aka The Bee Whisperer, recently moved homes with his bees. It was a challenging endeavor.

must have been a local swarm or two in trees somewhere, and they were checking out my stock as a possible new home. I was in danger of the bees moving into our new place before we did! Certainly this was a good omen for the Bee Whisperer.

So finally the move is done, but the work has just begun. The bee supply store is up and running more or less. I'm clearing some land out back before moving most of the bees in, but the process has started. Every day or two, a few more hives get set up.

We are having a lot of house renovations done, so half of my barn is full of our stuff. In part of the barn not stuffed with furniture I am building a honey processing kitchen. Once that's done, more folks in the region can enjoy the products of my bees' labors. Upstairs in the

barn I plan to hold some beekeeping classes.

Swarming season is now well underway. So many hives that made it strongly through the winter have been so populous that they have swarmed very early in the great weather we have been having. All beekeepers should be aware of the possibility of swarming and be prepared to capture any swarms that issue from their hives. Better still, they should prevent the swarm by splitting strong hives that show any signs of swarming, like lots of drone brood and queen cell development.

I am glad to see some rain this coming week. Too dry means little nectar, and while there has been a lot of nectar come in during May, there was a risk of the flowers drying up for June. A

good mixture of water in the ground and warm days and nights is what brings on the honey flows.

My aim this year will be to run 30 to 40 hives through the summer. That should be enough to put my honey extracting kitchen to the test! Definitely time to put an electric motor on my honey extractor.

Peter Cowin, aka The Bee Whisperer, is president of the Penobscot County Beekeepers Association. His activities include honey production, pollination services, beekeeping lessons, sales of bees and bee equipment, and the removal of feral bee hives from homes and other structures. Check out "The Bee Whisperer" on Facebook, email petercowin@tds.net or call 299-6948.

Holyoke

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the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Resources, said the fish is undoubtedly a state record, but said there's really no reason why a rainbow trout should be in a quarry pond in Vinalhaven.

"We do stock a few quarry ponds on the island, but we only stock brook trout. The state has never stocked rainbows there. So it's likely a private stocking," Ashe said in an email. "Some of those quarry ponds are deep and have water quality (i.e. cold water and oxygen) that is suitable for trout growth and survival. If fishing pressure is light, it's possible for stocked rainbows to do very well. I would never have an-

anticipated a rainbow to grow to 13-plus pounds in that environment, but given the right water quality, diet, competition (or lack thereof), rainbows are hearty and can grow surprisingly large."

Ashe said quarry ponds remain mysterious to him. They're mostly man-made, he said, and often have no inlet or outlet. And not much lives in them.

"I would imagine the number of fish species were originally very, very limited... like zero," Ashe wrote. "I think the only fish species that could have actually reached the vast majority of these ponds, on their own, were American eels. Eels are crazy critters, capable of slithering across very long stretches of waterless terrain."

But there is another way any number of fish might

have arrived in the quarry ponds of Vinalhaven.

"Humans love to relocate fishes. It's not natural, but it's in [their] nature to do so," Ashe wrote. "So, many of these quarries now have more complex fish assemblages. In the quarry pond Tim [Kelley] visited, we have confirmed just eel, golden shiner, and stocked brook trout. The state hasn't sampled this particular quarry since 1989, so the fish assemblage could be markedly different now. We may head out there this summer to sample."

Moving fish to new waters — often called "bucket stocking" — is not legal in Maine, and biologists say the activity often causes myriad problems in watersheds where it takes place.

The fish was the first rainbow trout that Kelley has ever caught, but he says now that

he might have come close to landing another one several years ago, in the same quarry pond.

"About seven or eight years ago I was fishing that same pond, from the other side, and I hooked onto a good one and I saw a flash [like a rainbow might make]," Kelley said. "I got it almost up to the rocks and it broke my line, and the person I was with said it was a rainbow."

A rainbow? Or the rainbow that's now at the taxidermist's shop? That's a question Kelley will never have an answer for.

"I haven't fished out there since I left," Kelley said. "[The record-breaking fish] might even be the same one I lost."

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Hike

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wide in others, and it includes a narrow bog bridge. This is a great trail to look for wildflowers and a variety of other forest plants.

The Bog Trail is 1 mile, round trip, and ends with a wide, wooden boardwalk that travels out into a coastal plateau bog with subarctic and arctic plants rarely seen south of Canada, according to the Bureau of Parks and Land. The boardwalk forms a loop, and along the way are interpretive displays about how peatland is formed and the different plants found in the habitat.

The Inland Trail is 0.4 mile long and spans from the park's south parking area to the intersection with the Bog Trail and Thompson Trail. This is the most improved section of trail in the park. Wide and surfaced with gravel, this trail travels through a hilly conifer forest abundant in mosses and lichens.

And finally, the Coast Guard Trail is a 1-mile horseshoe-shaped trail that begins and ends at different points near the lighthouse. The trail travels traces the rocky coast to visit an overlook of Lubec Channel.

Most visitors to the park are instantly drawn to the West Quoddy Head Lighthouse, which has served as a beacon for ships off the rocky coast of Maine for more than 200 years. The original lighthouse was commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson and built in 1808, according to information provided by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. However, the present tower and house is a bit younger, dating back to 1858. It was staffed by lighthouse keepers until 1988, when the U.S. Coast Guard automated the light.

Today, visitors can picnic on the lawn beside the lighthouse, where a stone monument marks the location as the "Easternmost Point in the U.S.A." From that point, you can look across Quoddy Channel to the cliffs of Grand Manan Island in New Brunswick. And closer, just off shore, is Sail Rock, which reportedly caused many shipwrecks and belongs to the US.

The lighthouse is home to a visitor center, which is wheelchair accessible and open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. from Memorial Day weekend through mid-October.

While exploring the park, keep an eye out for local wildlife. The tall ocean cliffs offer great vantage points for observing whales, sea ducks and other birds fishing off shore. During spring and fall migration, hundreds of shorebirds congregate near the park's western

boundary at Lubec Flats and Carrying Place Outlet, according to the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands.

Dogs are permitted in the park but must be kept on a leash no longer than 4 feet at all times. Hunting is permitted but not within 1,000 feet of the lighthouse.

The park is open 9 a.m. to sunset daily from May 15 to Oct. 15, and visitors can continue to use the park during the offseason by parking outside the gate, which will be closed, and walking in during the same hours. Keep in mind that park facilities, such as outhouses, are closed during the offseason, and camping is prohibited in the park year-round.

For more information about the park or to learn about helping the park through stewardship or maintenance work, visit maine.gov/quoddyhead or call 733-0911.

Personal note: When people learn that I write about hiking trails in Maine, they often ask me about my favorite trail. And while I find it impossible to select just one trail as my favorite, it's easy for me to come up with a list of favorites — places I find especially beautiful and interesting in Maine. Admittedly, it's a long list, and it's only getting longer.

On June 2, Quoddy Head State Park became one of those favorite places for me. The views were spectacular, the habitats diverse and the trails interesting and well-maintained. The park offered so many opportunities to explore and learn about history, geology and nature, and this experience was enhanced by the many interpretive displays located along the trails.

With my dog Oreo for company, I hiked four of the five trails — we didn't make it to the Coastguard Trail — for about 4.5 miles of walking.

The bright sun quickly warmed my skin, yet the temperature remained in the mid-60s. A cool, fresh breeze blew steadily from the ocean, banishing the black flies and mosquitoes that so often accompany me during hikes this time of year.

I especially enjoyed Green Point, which visitors had adorned with piles of carefully balanced rocks. Park managers often dislike visitors creating these rock piles, known as cairns, because they can confuse trail users and the movement of rocks can cause erosion. But in this case, I have to admit the rock piles added a magical feeling to the location.

For more of Aislinn Sarnacki's adventures, visit her blog at actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com. Follow her on Twitter: @1minihikegirl.