

The Big Sit! – October 13, 2018
Aquia Landing Park, Stafford, VA
By Sally Knight

The remnants of Hurricane Michael had just passed through Virginia bringing back memories of our first Big Sit in 2016 when we were dealing with Hurricane Matthew. While the heavy rain had ended, the day dawned in the low 50's to heavy clouds and light showers. Still, three club members arrived at 6:30am to listen for owls. We were rewarded with an Eastern Screech Owl flying overhead and landing in an Eastern Cedar tree adjacent to our marked out circle. It had responded to the recording we played and then proceeded to call softly from its perch above us - a good start to our count!



More club members arrived and as the sky lightened, we started seeing, in addition to hearing, more species - Carolina Wren, Northern Cardinal, Belted Kingfisher, Song Sparrow, Wood Duck, Double-crested Cormorant, and American Crow. We were happy to see Joyce and Mike Bathke carrying with them breakfast supplies. The camp stove was set up and milk heated for hot chocolate, followed by eggs for scrambling, sausage links, and bread for toast - we were in business.

The showers ended early and as the morning wore on the clouds broke up and the sun eventually emerged.

By this time we had tallied a good number of expected species including Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Northern Mockingbird, Swamp Sparrow, Hairy Woodpecker, and a Pied-billed Grebe. The Blue Jays and at least two Red-bellied Woodpeckers made repeated trips to the oak tree next to the circle where they gorged on acorns. We also had a Brown Thrasher vocalizing before we finally spotted it and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo seen by most.

We had several Forster's and a Caspian Tern flying over Aquia Creek, as well as Laughing and Ring-billed Gulls. A pair of Bald Eagles were attending to a new nest in a tree on the opposite bank of the creek, both Turkey and Black Vultures soared overhead, and a total of 4 resident Mute Swans were present.





The sun brought in a few Warblers foraging for insects in the Cedar tree - we counted three Cape May's and about five Yellow-rumps. Unfortunately, we couldn't count the Palm Warblers that we're hanging out close to the restrooms despite attempting to see them from the circle. Some other birds seen by some, while taking a break from the circle, were Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blackpoll Warbler, and a King Rail that ambled across the park entrance road to the delight of a lucky few.

By midday the sun, and the warmth it had brought, was gone and the wind picked up making hearing any birds very difficult. Lunch was a good selection pot luck which we ate huddled under the shelter and blankets. Hot water was heated for tea and used as hand warmers too! The group started disbanding after lunch until only two of us remained. We added two more species - Downy Woodpecker and Rock Dove - before closing the circle at 2:45pm.

We tallied a total of 44 species, had 18 participants, and a good time was had by all. The Big Sit is as much of a social occasion as actual birding - enjoying the camaraderie of those who understand our passion for birds and being outdoors is key. Thanks to all, especially Joyce and Mike for cooking breakfast again, who came out and participated in our third annual Big Sit. I hope you will come join us next year; maybe we can make it up to 50 species.



Participants

Mike Lott, Joyce and Mike Bathke, Maureen Daly Hamm, Scott Byrd, Tim Stamps, Georgia Patton and daughter Joan, Jim Goehring, Bill Hohenstein, Marilyn Mendell, Dave Larson, Candice Lowther, Blake Gostelow, Jeff and Joan Pozner, Allen Seitner and Sally Knight

Species - 44

Canada Goose	Black Vulture	Tufted Titmouse
Mute Swan	Turkey Vulture	Carolina Wren
Wood Duck	Bald Eagle	Gray Catbird
Gadwall	Eastern Screech Owl	Brown Thrasher
Northern Pintail	Belted Kingfisher	Northern Mockingbird
Pied-billed Grebe	Red-bellied Woodpecker	European Starling
Rock Pigeon	Hairy Woodpecker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Mourning dove	Downy Woodpecker	Cape May Warbler
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Northern Flicker	Song Sparrow
Laughing Gull	American Kestrel	Swamp Sparrow
Ring-billed Gull	Blue Jay	White-throated Sparrow
Caspian Tern	Fish Crow	Northern Cardinal
Forster's Tern	American Crow	Red-winged Blackbird
Double-crested Cormorant	Tree Swallow	Common Grackle
Great Blue Heron	Carolina Chickadee	



Photos

1. Brown Thrasher by Dave Larson
2. Sally Knight and Dave Larson by Candice Lowther
3. Cape May Warbler by Sally Knight
4. Big Sit Participants by Sally Knight
5. Yellow-rumped Warbler by Sally Knight