

OFNC Seedathon, September 2, 2012

"Fortuna imperatrix mundi – Fortune, empress of the world" – or Destiny? Who or what was in control of the Seedathon this year? Throughout the day, and even prior to that, there was much evidence either way. The Seedathon was planned for the previous Sunday, but a serious eye infection sidelined Bob. The day before, Bernie injured a toe, delaying the start of the Seedathon by 10 minutes. Was there a negative force at work? On the other hand, the previous Sunday was very hot and a little windy, but conditions on our count were seemingly ideal, with only light winds from the northeast all night and reasonable temperatures. Was it Destiny that we did it today? Still, we were grateful that Bob was better, so we played a recitative from Handel's Messiah: "And Now the Eyes of the Blind Shall Be Opened," which also stressed the importance of our eyes and ears in this trip. Following that, we played a rousing work by Verdi, the overture to "The Force of Destiny." That, I figured, would set the tone.

Leaving at 4:25 am, our first stop at Munster gave us ideal listening conditions, and Bernie coaxed a Barred Owl to call. This was the first of two Barred Owls and three Great Horned Owls that called that morning. Our hopes rose with an impressive flight of Swainson's thrushes and Veeries, and we had our first bonus bird, a Gray-cheeked Thrush. While listening, we heard a Whip-poor-will, encouraging us to stay longer in the Munster area; there was no need to rush to the Carp Ridge. We had 27 species by dawn, and then it was off to Constance Creek. Among the goodies we got there were two Northern Waterthrush, a Virginia Rail and four species of heron. Was Fortune smiling on us?

Maybe not! Back up on the Carp Ridge, we were greeted by mostly silence, although we were lucky enough to hear an Eastern Towhee. What was wrong? A stop at Scrivens was almost a dead loss; the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, there as recently as the day before, was not seen, and two photographers had caused the plovers to fly. Britannia was about as dead as could be: no warbler flocks, and no swallows. A little discouraged, we left for Shirley's Bay. At that point, some appropriate music was in order. I played part of "Carmina Burana" by Carl Orff: "O Fortuna." Some of the text seemed all too appropriate: "*O Fortuna, velut Luna, statu variabilis, semper crescis aut decrescis* – O fortune, variable as the moon, always do you wax and wane." It seemed that we were in the waning phase of our Fortune.

The walk through the Shirley's Bay woods was even deader than Britannia. Much to our dismay, some birders on the dike informed us that a dowitcher had flown out of sight after being scared by a falcon, and 15 minutes previous to our arrival, a Northern Goshawk flew over! Still, some birds were there. By the time we left, thanks to some sharp observations by Bernie, our shorebird count was at a lucky 13. Still, on the way out we found that the Goshawk and flown over again! How appropriate the words of the song "*Sors immanis et inanis* – Monstrous and empty fate."

As we drove off, I played one more song from “Carmina Burana:” “*Fortune plango vulnera* – The wounds that Fortune blows.” The cruel whims of Fortune were becoming all too clear. Destiny was nowhere to be seen.

As we left Shirley’s bay, we were at 104 species, all told not that bad, but we needed a lot more. Now came decision time. We knew that the eastern sewage lagoons were poor. We could expect little for our effort. It was unheard of to drop the lagoons, but we did. It was off to Constance Bay, to see what we could scrape up. Indeed we did get six species we got nowhere else, including Red-headed woodpecker and Common Loon. Next came a strategy of desperation, Bernie’s idea – Bate Island at Champlain Bridge for warblers. It paid off with three new warblers among the hundred Yellow-rumped Warblers. Our warbler count was now up to a still below average 12. At our next stop, disappointment returned. Unlike previous years, the sparrow fields at the airport were almost empty of sparrows. Sheer luck got us a Grasshopper sparrow, but missing Vesper Sparrow was a first for the count. Fortune was indeed waxing and waning. The last great hope was the Moodie Drive pit. There we picked up five new species, four water birds, and the Bald Eagle we embarrassingly missed at Shirley’s Bay. Now at 121 species, our total had become better than the previous two years! Fortune was waxing! Was it Destiny? Now it was **not** necessary to play my reserve musical selection (“Fly away” by John Denver), intended only to be played if things were really bad. The day ended in a gorgeous and warm sunset overlooking the Deschênes rapids, giving us two more species, Caspian Tern and Bonaparte’s Gull. Our total was now 123, not a record high but quite respectable.

So what went wrong, or right? The lack of swallows and other aerial insect eating birds was a surprise (just a single Tree Swallow), as the weather has been consistently warm. Possibly, many birds cleared out when the weather changed the previous day. Possibly the empty sparrow fields were due to the hot dry July which gave a poor seed crop. There was no explanation for the lack of accipiters, as the weather conditions were ideal. It is doubtful that we missed much in the way of shorebirds and warblers, as other birders consistently reported a slow day. On the other hand, persistence paid off, as did the decision to drop the lagoons. Overall, we would say that the day started and ended well, with a mediocre middle. So who ruled the day, Fortune or Destiny? I’d call it a tie.

CANADA GOOSE	500	RED-HEADED WOODPECKER	1
WOOD DUCK	25	YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	2
GADWALL	3	DOWNY WOODPECKER	5
AMERICAN WIGEON	10	HAIRY WOODPECKER	5
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	30	NORTHERN FLICKER	5
MALLARD	700	PILEATED WOODPECKER	5
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	75	EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE	5
NORTHERN PINTAIL	1	EASTERN PHOEBE	5
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	40	GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER	5

REDHEAD	2	EASTERN KINGBIRD	3
RING-NECKED DUCK	40	WARBLING VIREO	5
LESSER SCAUP	6	RED-EYED VIREO	3
HOODED MERGANSER	2	BLUE JAY	40
COMMON MERGANSER	11	AMERICAN CROW	100
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	1	COMMON RAVEN	2
RUDDY DUCK	30	TREE SWALLOW	1
WILD TURKEY	12	BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	15
COMMON LOON	2	RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	1
PIED-BILLED GREBE	4	WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	5
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	100	BROWN CREEPER	2
AMERICAN BITTERN	2	EASTERN BLUEBIRD	7
GREAT BLUE HERON	20	VEERY	25
GREAT EGRET	10	GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH	1
GREEN HERON	1	SWAINSON'S THRUSH	50
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON	8	HERMIT THRUSH	1
TURKEY VULTURE	10	AMERICAN ROBIN	15
OSPREY	5	GRAY CATBIRD	10
BALD EAGLE	1	BROWN THRASHER	1
NORTHERN HARRIER	2	EUROPEAN STARLING	400
BROAD-WINGED HAWK	1	AMERICAN PIPIT	2
RED-TAILED HAWK	6	CEDAR WAXWING	50
AMERICAN KESTREL	2	TENNESSEE WARBLER	1
MERLIN	2	NASHVILLE WARBLER	1
PEREGRINE FALCON	1	YELLOW WARBLER	1
VIRGINIA RAIL	1	YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	100
COMMON GALLINULE	10	BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER	1
BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER	1	BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER	1
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	1	PALM WARBLER	2
KILLDEER	6	BAY-BREASTED WARBLER	1
SPOTTED SANDPIPER	4	BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER	1
SOLITARY SANDPIPER	1	AMERICAN REDSTART	2
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	3	NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH	3
LESSER YELLOWLEGS	16	COMMON YELLOWTHROAT	5
SANDERLING	2	EASTERN TOWHEE	1
SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER	20	CHIPPING SPARROW	10
LEAST SANDPIPER	1	FIELD SPARROW	2
PECTORAL SANDPIPER	5	SAVANNAH SPARROW	1
WILSON'S SNIPE	1	GRASSHOPPER SPARROW	1
RED-NECKED PHALAROPE	3	SONG SPARROW	10
BONAPARTE'S GULL	1	SWAMP SPARROW	3
RING-BILLED GULL	5000	WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	5
HERRING GULL	500	SCARLET TANAGER	2
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL	1	NORTHERN CARDINAL	4
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL	65	ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK	3
CASPIAN TERN	6	BOBOLINK	10

COMMON TERN	8	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	10
ROCK PIGEON	10	COMMON GRACKLE	20
MOURNING DOVE	35	PURPLE FINCH	15
GREAT HORNED OWL	3	HOUSE FINCH	1
BARRED OWL	2	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	30
WHIP-POOR-WILL	1	HOUSE SPARROW	3
BELTED KINGFISHER	6		