

**THE KINGPISHERS**  
**2022 BIRDATHON, MARIN COUNTY, CA**  
**10 OCTOBER = Total 141 species**



Started many years ago by enthusiastic folks at Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO, now Point Blue Conservation Science), the idea of a ‘bird-athon’ (often abbreviated to BAT = trying to find as many bird species as you can in a 24-hour period) has become a tradition that has morphed into Point Blue’s annual *Rich Stallcup Birdathon*. This year, 2022, we (Catherine Hickey, Steve Howell; above) decided to reprise our 2020 Birdathon but keep it local—Covid taught us a lot more about our local area, which is good for birds, so we limited our route to a three-mile radius from home—bird locally, think globally. For those who may be less familiar with birding jargon, the team name ‘Kingfishers’ is a play on pishing, the art of making various noises to invoke curiosity in birds and encourage them to reveal themselves.

With daily local birding for the preceding few days, including a little site-specific scouting the day before, on Monday 10 October we took the plunge for the 2022 Kingpisher BAT. It’s hard, impossible really, to know

the weather in advance and ‘real-world’ work commitments limited our options, but we lucked out with the weather: daily low fog of the previous week broke a little the afternoon before, and a mostly clear full-moon night helped migration—on balance, more birds arrived overnight than left! We awoke to low cloud (classic ‘undercast’ conditions that can presage a migration arrival on the coast) and, although our timing was perhaps a little late in the season, we didn’t do too badly. Sun broke through intermittently in mid-late afternoon, but it never got windy, and really, we couldn’t have asked for better birding weather.

Our 6.30 am, pre-dawn start around Bolinas Lagoon produced no rails, but a tooting Saw-whet Owl was nice, and the sounds of curlews from the lagoon reminded us that some birds are happy to feed at night, tide permitting. We headed south of Stinson Beach for a mile or so as dawn bled almost imperceptibly through the fog. Wrentits dominated the brief morning chorus, but eventually a twangy *djew-djew-djew-djew-djew* signaled Rufous-crowned Sparrow, our main goal at this southern extremity of our route. Back to the Stinson Beach parking lot where a modest selection of western songbird migrants (including our only Wilson’s Warbler, so common here a month ago) pushed us past 60 species by 8 am. We invested almost 3 hours around Stinson and Bolinas Lagoon, finding most of we hoped for, plus bonus Mourning Dove, Northern Mockingbird, and American Pipit, all three of which are very easy to miss in this part of the world on any given day. A couple of Parasitic Jaegers harassed Elegant Terns offshore at the fog edge; we picked out a Clark’s Grebe among the closest group of Western Grebes, and our only Common Loon of the day appeared as we were about to head off. As well as the usual shorebirds on the lagoon mudflats, a lone adult Herring Gull stood out among the California Gulls; a surprise Black-throated Gray Warbler hopped in a roadside alder; and a Pelagic Cormorant, which perched on a roadside (and lagoon-side) boulder (!), made 100 species at 10.59 am. Not a bad start, but now it would go more slowly as we headed into hometown Bolinas for the rest of the day.

Still, that meant almost 8 hours of birding around our local spots, when it soon became apparent that we had time, if we wanted, to wait for birds we knew should be around, and our plan even afforded us the chance to go back and visit sites two—or even three—times. And when

we were done, we'd be within minutes of a cold beer/glass of wine, hot shower, and dinner. The local town BAT might be here to stay! Our first stop, at a traditional sapsucker tree, failed us, as did a short drive looking for Wild Turkey (which we'd seen the day before) and so (after spreading birdseed in Steve's yard) on to Duxbury Reef. Just before high tide, a couple of Black Oystercatchers clung to the last remaining dry bit of reef, but no Black Turnstones. With time for a leisurely ocean scan on glassy waters, we failed to find any murrelets—hundreds of mures, though—and seeking a Horned Grebe amid the rafts of Westerns also failed—but turned up a better bird: Red-necked Grebe, very much a local rarity. On land, we worked the 'local flock' dominated by Pygmy Nuthatches, Bush-tits, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Townsend's Warblers to eventually locate a Nashville Warbler, which we knew had been around—some 45 minutes of peering high into trees against poor light, but at least we found it (plus the local roosting Great Horned Owl, Brown Creeper, and Pacific Wren = 4 more species).

With the potential for ten new species, the sewage ponds were high on our list of stops, but first a drop-in to see if the seed Steve had spread in his yard had pulled in the White-throated Sparrow that had been around... Success! Plus a dapper male Lesser Goldfinch feeding on the thistles, and even a nice juvenile Broad-winged Hawk circling low overhead as the sun

*White-throated Sparrow (left) and Lesser Goldfinch, a couple of nice yard birds that helped us on our way*



*The preceding few days of fog dammed up raptor migration, but this young Broad-winged Hawk was still a pleasant surprise*

broke through to generate the first thermal of the day. We also found our only Lincoln's Sparrow of the day, a species usually quite common but this fall notably scarce, apparently doing its part for GAD21 (the Great Avian Decline of the 21st Century = Steve's coined term); four more species in 15 minutes, up to 119 by 2.30 pm, when we made a circuit of the sewage ponds. Our only House Sparrow of the day (hey, they all count!) sat on the fence as we walked in, and we ended up with 11 out of a possible 10 species! A newly arrived Ruddy Duck was the surprise, along with hoped-for Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Shoveler, continuing Cinnamon Teal and Palm Warbler and others. Now 'only' 3.35 pm, and we were at the unanticipated total of 130 species.

What to do next? The sunny skies suggested a drive out to Palomarin looking for Ferruginous Hawk might pay off—but no. Still, we did find Red-breasted Nuthatch and Golden-crowned Kinglet there, two more species that fell into place. Another try for turkeys, via checking farm ponds for ducks—Eurasian Wigeon a nice surprise, and Tricolored Blackbirds—but no turkeys. And no sapsucker, where we'd seen one beautifully the day before, as the 5 pm siren at the Stinson Beach fire station sounded from afar. But, finally, an Oak Titmouse, right at the edge of its local range, plus Pied-billed Grebe on a pond where we'd discovered it the day before, along



with a newly arrived White-fronted Goose, and an unexpected Pileated Woodpecker calling loudly, number 138! Could we make 140? A second failed try in town for Tropical Kingbird (found two days ago by Steve, but seemingly now departed) and for Black Turnstone lost us some time, and the sun headed inexorably for the horizon fog bank... Catherine made a heroic jog out to locate a known Burrowing Owl just before sunset, and we headed on to Palomarin hoping to hear a Varied Thrush at dusk, or a Spotted Owl as night fell. Nope, zero for two. However, driving back slowly to town we came across a Common Poorwill feeding in the road, and our last effort for Barn Owl paid off on a quiet side road. Total 141 species and done by 7.30 pm. Ex-hausted.

It was appreciably more species than we'd hoped for in 13 hours of birding within a three-mile radius of home, but helped greatly by near-perfect weather and by the assistance and hospitality of the communities of Bolinas and Stinson Beach. In particular, we thank the following for their logistical support and access to certain sites: Steve Trivelpiece and Audubon Canyon Ranch; the Seadrift Association; the Bolinas Community Public Utility District; Mark Dettling and Point Blue Conservation Science; the Matson household; and Enzo Resta. Our BAT 2022 was most definitely a fun-filled birding adventure, a great antidote to the mass-media blitz that seems to fill our lives these days—and staying so local, we spent more time outside the car than inside. Best birds? Always a personal choice, but Red-necked Grebe, Broad-winged Hawk, Common Poorwill, and Palm Warbler are all up there.

PS. People often ask: What were the 'worst' misses? Well, Wild Turkey and Red-breasted Sapsucker (both seen the day before) come to mind; adding insult to injury, a sapsucker landed almost in Steve's face the next day as he stepped out the door! Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, and Black Turnstone were all around in the preceding days, and other hoped-for species included Pacific Loon, Horned Grebe, Wilson's Snipe, Cedar Waxwing, and possibly even Brown-headed Cowbird or Pectoral Sandpiper ... the list could go on. But of course, it's the unpredictability of birding that makes it fun; there's always a challenge, and you never know what you might see around the next corner!

***Happy birding and keep caring!***



*Burrowing Owl made 139 for the day...*



*Palm Warbler, one of ten warbler species found on our local BAT*

## THE KINGPISHERS : OUR SPECIES LIST (141)

### 2022 BIRDATHON, MARIN COUNTY, CA

#### WATERBIRDS

##### Swimming (24 species)

(Greater) White-fronted Goose—two sites, big waterfowl arrival last night  
Cackling Goose—heard in fog and 5 seen in Bolinas  
Canada Goose  
Eurasian Wigeon—1 with Americans on Mesa  
American Wigeon  
Cinnamon Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Mallard  
Northern Pintail  
Green-winged Teal  
Greater Scaup—8 flying south off Agate  
Surf Scoter  
Ruddy Duck—Bolinas, arrived last night  
Pied-billed Grebe—1 on Horseshoe Hill pond  
Red-necked Grebe—1 with Western Grebes off Agate, very good bird locally  
Eared Grebe  
Western Grebe  
Clark's Grebe—at least 1 off Stinson among Westerns  
Red-throated Loon  
Common Loon  
Brandt's Cormorant  
Pelagic Cormorant  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Common Murre—hundreds

##### Flying (9 species)

Brown Pelican  
Heermann's Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
California Gull  
Western Gull  
Glaucous-winged Gull—adult at Stinson  
Herring Gull—adult on lagoon  
Elegant Tern  
Parasitic Jaeger—at least 2 chasing terns off Stinson spit

##### Walking (18 species)

Black Oystercatcher—2 at Agate, high tide  
American Avocet

Black-bellied Plover  
Killdeer  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Willet  
Whimbrel  
Long-billed Curlew  
Marbled Godwit  
Dunlin  
Least Sandpiper  
Western Sandpiper  
Long-billed Dowitcher  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Snowy Egret  
Black-crowned Night Heron

#### LANDBIRDS

##### Gamebirds (1 species)

California Quail

##### Raptors and Owls (15 species)

Turkey Vulture  
Bald Eagle—2 sightings, Lagoon and Agate (adults)  
White-tailed Kite  
Northern Harrier—one low flyover migrant, Agate  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Cooper's Hawk  
Red-shouldered Hawk  
Broad-winged Hawk—1 over Bolinas, a good week for them  
Red-tailed Hawk  
American Kestrel  
Merlin—1 male heading south, Bolinas  
Barn Owl—1 at Commonweal, last new species for BAT  
Great Horned Owl  
Burrowing Owl—stake-out on Mesa Road  
Northern saw-whet Owl

##### Larger Landbirds (11 species)

Common Poorwill—1 hunting along Mesa road, penultimate new species for BAT  
Band-tailed Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Belted Kingfisher

Acorn Woodpecker  
Nuttall's Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker (Red-shafted)  
Pileated Woodpecker—nice surprise at Paradise Valley, while failing to find sapsuckers

### **Aerial Landbirds (1 species)**

Anna's Hummingbird

### **Songbirds (62 species)**

'Western' Flycatcher (presumed Pacific-slope)—only 2, Stinson, getting late  
Black Phoebe  
Say's Phoebe  
Hutton's Vireo  
Warbling Vireo—at least 3, Stinson  
Steller's Jay  
California Scrub Jay  
American Crow  
Northern (Common) Raven  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee  
Oak Titmouse—1, finally, Olema–Bolinás Road  
Bushtit  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Pygmy Nuthatch  
Brown Creeper  
House Wren (Northern)  
Pacific (née Winter) Wren  
Marsh Wren  
Bewick's Wren  
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher—south of Stinson  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Wrentit  
Western Bluebird  
Hermit Thrush  
Swainson's Thrush  
American Robin  
Northern Mockingbird—Stinson  
European Starling  
American Pipit—1 only, Stinson  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Nashville Warbler—continuing bird, Bolinas  
Common Yellowthroat

Yellow Warbler—2 late singles, almost all gone now  
Palm Warbler—continuing bird, Bolinas  
Audubon's (Yellow-rumped) Warbler  
Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler—most of the world treats this and Audubon's as two species  
Black-throated Gray Warbler—1 random bird along Bolinas Lagoon  
Townsend's Warbler  
Wilson's Warbler—Stinson, a late migrant  
Spotted Towhee  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow—south of Stinson  
California Towhee  
Savannah Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow—only 1, oddly scarce this fall  
White-throated Sparrow—Bolinás stake-out  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Golden-crowned Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)  
Western Tanager—Bolinás, only 1, getting late  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Tricolored Blackbird—Bolinás, small numbers of this declining and threatened species  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Western Meadowlark  
House Finch  
Purple Finch  
Pine Siskin  
Lesser Goldfinch  
American Goldfinch  
House Sparrow

### **MAMMALS**

Humpback Whale  
Harbor Porpoise  
Harbor Seal  
Mule Deer  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit  
Brush Rabbit  
Northern Raccoon  
Coyote  
Western Gray Squirrel  
Eastern Fox Squirrel—2 different individuals, Stinson area  
Sonoma Chipmunk