

Birding by Sound at Hamilton Lakes Park and the Bog Garden May 5, 2018

Submitted by Matt Wangerin, Trip Coordinator



Photo Credit: Barbara Haralson

Sixteen existing and prospective members of the PBC participated in quiet walks around Hamilton Lakes Park and the Bog Garden in Greensboro to hone their nature-listening skills, which are imperative to successful birding for spring migrants in the Piedmont. Hamilton Lakes, especially, is a concentrated, dense woodland associated with a creek, and oftentimes, one can never set eyes upon a particular bird. Therefore, Elizabeth and Henry Link's excellent hearing and mental encyclopedias of birdsong were needed to identify the species.

While many of us are familiar with the songs and calls of the Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, and Northern Cardinal (there were many of those), it becomes necessary to assimilate those sounds and move on or to "filter them out". In doing so, we concentrated on listening for migratory warblers, thrushes, and the like.

We were quickly and luckily able to hear a sharp, high song, rising and ending almost above our hearing registers. Searching way above – ugh...warbler neck! – there was a first of season Blackburnian Warbler. Everyone got good looks at the beautiful, flaming-orange throat. Here (hear?) and there, we were also able to identify the buzzy, rising trill of the Northern Parula high above and, lower to the ground, the slower husky song of the Black-throated Blue Warbler. To visually reinforce that song into our growing birdsong vocabularies, we noted the field marks of the handsome male bird.

Once we started to really listen, we realized just how many birds we heard (and squirrels, dogs, and chain-saws, etc.).

Let's go Filter – Kick in! There was the familiar, rich gurgling song of a Wood Thrush. Henry assisted us to identify the songs of Canada Warbler and Cape May Warbler, more beauties singing from the treetops. Soon after, we heard what we thought was a robin singing, but Elizabeth cautioned us to listen for the “hoarseness” of the notes. This denoted the Scarlet Tanager instead, and the group saw him very well – another favorite. Zzzzzipp! That was a Ruby-throated Hummingbird; not as nice as seeing it at one's nectar feeder, but that zip is typically what we can expect in the field.

We learned that cupping one's hands behind one's ears can focus the sound. This was necessary to hear the soft, fuzzy, ethereal flute-like songs and simple calls of the Swainson's Thrush and Gray-cheeked Thrush.



Photo Credit: Jean Murdick



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Swainson's Thrush



Photo Credit: Matt Wangerin, Gray-cheeked Thrush

However, that method usually wasn't required to hear the incessant chatter of the Red-eyed Vireo or the loud “Prrrt!” call of the Great Crested Flycatcher.

We learned a lot about listening when birding – how important it can be for bird identification and for not missing the many other birds that are so difficult to see. The group very much enjoyed the morning, and altogether, we heard and saw 63 species of birds at the two locations.

Participant List: Nancy Adamson, Frank Cashwell, Wanda & Charlene Fortner, Lynne Gray, Barbara Haralson, Josh Hoffman, Elizabeth & Henry Link, Lorraine & Steve Marshall, Jean Murdick, Amy Parrish, Tom Suher, Matt Wangerin, and Melissa Whitmire.



Photo Credit: Jean Murdick

Bird List:

Canada Goose	Blue Jay	Cape May Warbler
Mallard	American Crow	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Fish Crow	Blackburnian Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Carolina Chickadee	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Cooper's Hawk	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Pine Warbler
Red-shouldered Hawk	Tufted Titmouse	American Redstart
Spotted Sandpiper	White-breasted Nuthatch	Common Yellowthroat
Solitary Sandpiper	Brown-headed Nuthatch	Canada Warbler
Mourning Dove	Carolina Wren	Hooded Warbler
Barred Owl	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Scarlet Tanager
Chimney Swift	Gray-cheeked Thrush	Summer Tanager
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Swainson's Thrush	Northern Cardinal
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Wood Thrush	Eastern Towhee
Downy Woodpecker	Veery	Chipping Sparrow
Hairy Woodpecker	American Robin	White-throated Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Gray Catbird	Song Sparrow
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Northern Mockingbird	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Great Crested Flycatcher	Cedar Waxwing	Brown-headed Cowbird
Eastern Kingbird	Northern Parula	Common Grackle
White-eyed Vireo	Chestnut-sided Warbler	House Finch
Red-eyed Vireo	Magnolia Warbler	American Goldfinch