

Spring Birding in New York City

Naturetrek Tour Report

2 - 9 May 2019



Blackburnian Warbler



American Goldfinch



Scarlet Tanager



Worm-eating Warbler

Report & Images compiled by Peter J Dunn



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Peter Dunn (Leader) with seven Naturetrek Clients

Day 1

Thursday 2nd May

Arrival Day

On a nice warm sunny morning four of the group arrived at JFK Airport, New York ahead of schedule to meet Peter and two other guests, who were already in the States, in the Arrivals hall. Taxis were soon arranged and we started to recognise some of the iconic skyline buildings as we approached Manhattan. However the once proud Empire State and Chrysler Buildings were being dwarfed by new builds.

We arrived at our hotel, ideally positioned on 7th Avenue between Times Square and Central Park, to meet our final group member who had flown into Newark.

Bags were tagged and suitable clothing was donned before adjourning to the Park Café for a light lunch and Peter outlined the format of the week ahead with provisos for a changing weather forecast.

Following refreshments Peter took the group for a walk to the southern section of Central Park, past Carnegie Hall and into a busy green space which initially looked devoid of wildlife but with some patience we started to notch up our first real American birds, with many American Robins, some nice red Northern Cardinals, and our first warblers in the shape of Black-throated Blue and Black & White. Two bright coloured Scarlet Tanagers were a marvel for tired eyes and a singing Blue-headed Vireo was a bonus. Just before we left the park a group of baby Grey Squirrels entertained us and Colin then spied a sleeping Raccoon in a tree. Not a bad start and we had barely scratched the surface of the park!

The return route took us down the famous Broadway and then back to hotel where the rooms were now available and we freshened up before meeting at 5:30 to head out for a stroll and dinner. After dinner the group went down to experience Times Square before heading for bed.

Day 2

Friday 3rd May

Central Park – central area

Most were awake early and we gathered in the Park Café before heading for the subway for a short journey to 72nd Street – this for many was an experience in itself. We entered the Park at Strawberry Fields past the John Lennon 'Imagine' Mosaic and started to gather our bird sightings. It was cooler today with overcast misty skies hiding the tops of the city skyscrapers so activity was initially slow. However American Robins and the numerous White-throated Sparrows led the way as we noted Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, Black & White Warblers and a smart but distant male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. We noted the similarity of the Ruby-crowned Kinglets to Goldcrests and the song of Warbling Vireo sounded similar to Eurasian Blackcap. As we approached the lake we saw a number of male Common Yellowthroats flicking around in the low scrub and a metallic tick alerted us to a Northern Waterthrush feeding on the water's edge like a sandpiper. Orange and black Baltimore Orioles were seen well as was a nice yellow and black Prairie Warbler. Red-eared Slider terrapins skulked in the water as a Black-crowned Night Heron flew across the lake and Red-winged Blackbirds sang their scratchy song.

We headed to the restrooms near the Swiss Cottage and then on to the hill next to Belvedere Castle. The height here was productive as we looked into the tops of the trees. Black-throated Blue, American Yellow and Myrtle Warblers flitted around the trees with American Redstarts and an immaculate deep brick-red male Orchard Oriole was feeding amongst the tree flowers. As the castle was under repair and access was closed we retraced our steps and entered the famous Ramble seeing a nice Great Crested Flycatcher on route. The Ramble is a maze of paths through some fantastic woodland habitat, ideal for the Ovenbird and Wood Thrush which we glimpsed as we slowly made our way through and past Azalea Pond. Teresa spotted a smart male Hooded Warbler which was actively flicking its tail, showing off the white outer feathers, as we made our way to the Boathouse Café where we had refreshments and a warm-up.

We decided to head for The Point - a good spot for migrants - where we added Palm and Black-throated Green Warbler, a pair of Northern Flickers and had a better view of a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Time was ticking on and we returned to the boathouse at 12:30 for lunch of hot soup or burgers.

The cloud remained in the afternoon and some light rain fell but the birds kept coming. We chanced upon a nice group of American Goldfinches, including some smart males, drinking from a small muddy stream and in amongst them we had a pair of Purple Finches with several House Finches and a smart male Indigo Bunting. As we started to make our way back towards Strawberry Fields we came upon a nice group of Magnolia Warblers feeding together and we then returned to the hotel by 3:30pm so people could organise and book some entertainment for the coming days.

We met up again at 5pm to complete the days checklist which had amassed 53 species including 12 species of warbler, after which many of the group headed out to visit some landmarks such as the World Trade Centre 9/11 museum.

Day 3

Saturday 4th May

Prospect Park, Brooklyn

We met again for an early breakfast before heading out on the Q line towards Brooklyn to visit Prospect Park. It was overcast but slightly warmer than yesterday as we entered the park. The now familiar sounds of grackles, Blue Jays and Warbling Vireo's could be heard from the woods as we approached, and we started to see good numbers of Myrtle or Yellow-rumped Warblers. Unfortunately it started to rain so we headed for the shelter of the trees by the lake. Here we saw some smart Wood Duck and both Great Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron fed around the shoreline with two Spotted Sandpipers. We were mesmerised by the scarlet wing patches of the male Red-winged Blackbirds as they displayed noisily in the lakeside vegetation and a very loud Bullfrog was calling from the reeds.

As the rain had subsided, we headed up to Lookout Hill where the largest tree was alive with warblers. Amongst the numerous Myrtles were some smart looking Black-throated Green and Parula Warblers and we also managed to identify both Pine and Yellow-throated Warbler. A nice find was a Yellow-throated Vireo hunting insect in the lower branches.

We descended the hill back to the lake and restrooms and as the rain returned we headed to a shelter to eat our sandwiches which we had earlier bought at the deli. Sheltering from the rain we had good views of a Great

Northern Diver (Common Loon), Ruddy Duck, American Coot and a number off Laughing Gulls on the lake and a showy Eastern Kingbird was flycatching from the reeds. We waited for the rain to ease but finally decided that it was probably better to head back to Manhattan.

As we surfaced from the subway on 7th Avenue, Manhattan was bathed in sunshine so a few of the group opted to go up to Central Park whilst others decided to see some of the sights.

The Park was warm, sunny and busy with people but we still managed to see some nice colourful male Scarlet Tanagers, Swainson's Thrush and Nashville Warbler amongst the usual collection of birds.

The group spent the evening visiting the sights of New York, arranging to meet the next morning for breakfast.

Day 4

Sunday 5th May

New York City

Well, it had to happen - a day with continuous rain and even the local bird reporting service stated because of the rain they would accept records and images from previous days. However all was not lost as all members of the group had agendas and plans for a rainy day, many of which revolved around visiting one or more of the excellent museums. On the list were of course the Natural History Museum, The Guggenheim, Museum of Modern Art and various other indoor attractions.

The forecast was unfortunately correct and it did not stop all day, so after going our separate ways on our cultural visits, we reconvened at 5pm to talk over the plans for tomorrow – a better day was promised and we caught up with our bird list from the previous day, before the evening shows and visits.

Day 5

Monday 6th May

Jamaica Bay Wildfowl Refuge

After an early breakfast we collected our packed lunch from the deli and then headed to Columbus Circle to 'Take the A Train' as Duke Ellington proclaimed, although he was going uptown to Harlem and we were heading downtown out to Jamaica Bay. The journey was about an hour and as we approached Broad Channel Station in glorious sunshine, we started to see flocks of Black Brant geese and Great Egrets along the shoreline.

The entrance to the reserve is about a 30 minutes amble from the station, all depending on what we see between the houses on the way. Today it was mainly Brant and Laughing Gulls with a few Common Terns. The centre was closed again as it was last year but thankfully the restrooms were open and we made use of them before heading down to do the circular route around the west pool. A well-stocked feeder behind the centre had plenty of Red-winged Blackbirds, White-throated Sparrows and some nice male House Finches.

Walking along the route we had frequent stops to watch many Yellow-rumped and a few Yellow Warblers feeding on masses of insects in the now warming temperature and we were entertained by Ospreys overhead and flocks of waders on the shoreline, mainly consisting of Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Dunlin, Knot and a few Semipalmated Sandpipers. The insects also attracted flocks of feeding Tree and Barn Swallows and a few Sand

(Bank Swallow) Martins. The sweet song of mimicking Northern Mockingbirds drifted around the bushes and we saw quite a few.

Out on the central lagoon were small flocks of Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, a few Black Duck and Mallard. One of the highlights was watching a pair of smart Brown Thrashers dashing back and forth across the track, with one finally stopping out in the open to feed on a tree flower. We were able to see the identification features of a Field Sparrow which was new for our list, and as we approached the mainland side of the loop, we disturbed a nice Yellow-billed Cuckoo which began to feed out in the open. We watched it hunting caterpillars in the trees and it spent some time extracting these from a nursery web nest.

As noon approached we sat and had our delicious deli sandwiches on benches under the trees, entertained by Red-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Towhee and Northern Parula.

Suitably refreshed we headed back to the centre, seeing some nice Blue-headed Vireos, Parula and Black & White Warblers on the way, used the facilities and then crossed the road to the North Pool trail. It was somewhat quieter here with mainly Yellow-rumps and Parula but also a brief Great Crested Flycatcher. The pool had similar duck to the other one but we also added a Great Blue Heron and what looked like a Snapping Turtle.

Time was now getting on and we started to make our way back to Broad Channel station to catch our train back to Manhattan, entertained for some of the way by local 'buskers' who rapped or 'pole danced' to music.

We seemed to have had the best of the weather because as we emerged from the subway it was cloudy and cooler in Manhattan for the walk back to the hotel.

We met at 5:30pm for our checklist and briefing for the next day before going out into the city for more sightseeing.

Day 6

Tuesday 7th May

Central Park, northern section

The day dawned overcast but mild as we gathered again for breakfast at 6am before heading out on the B train to the northern section of Central Park. We had our sumptuous packed lunches again from the local deli and headed down from the subway into the area known as the loch and ravine where a small stream flowed. Initially it seemed quieter with fewer warblers but we eventually started to see birds feeding in the trees or coming down to drink or bathe. We started with a nice Yellow-throated Vireo and some good views of Veery and Magnolia Warbler. Over the stream, a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers hawked insects while the songs of Black-throated Blue and Northern Parula Warblers echoed around the trees. We dawdled around the stream where Swamp Sparrow was added to the list and Northern Waterthrushes teetered around on the banks.

We walked up to the Great Hill where Chimney Swifts hawked overhead and used the restrooms before heading to the 'blockhouse' on the northern edge of the park, overlooking Harlem. The sun had now come out and it was pleasantly warm, so we decided to have our lunches sat on the rocks at this point, looking into the tops of the trees. Male Indigo Bunting and Baltimore Orioles added a splash of colour whilst the tell-tale song of a Red-eyed Vireo alerted us to its presence and we managed to find it in the trees.

After lunch we started to slowly make our way back south. Some of the group headed back into town to visit the High Line walk on the west side whilst the rest of us passed back through the loch. Here we added Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a pair of Scarlet Tanagers and managed to identify a late Louisiana Waterthrush walking along the stream. As we emerged out of the ravine near to the tennis courts, we met an American birder who had discovered a Worm-eating Warbler and this little brown bird with head-stripes performed excellently for us. We then continued passed the Jackie Onassis Reservoir and, as the weather had warmed up, we headed towards Tanner's Pond which attracted birds to drink. This was an excellent choice as we were soon watching Northern Waterthrush, Magnolia and Black & White Warblers extremely closely as they drank or bathed. Highlight however was a smart male Blackburnian Warbler which was originally seen high in the elms but eventually came down to drink affording some nice photos.

This had been a great last full day but it was soon time to head back to the hotel via the subway to prepare for our evening.

After the usual checklist rollcall six of us went to Rosie O'Grady's, a popular restaurant near to Times Square and enjoyed a very tasty meal whilst chatting about the week and its highlights.

We left the restaurant to find that it was raining and headed back to the hotel for the night, looking forward to our last morning in the Park.

Day 7

Wednesday 8th May

Departure

Seven of us met at 6am for an early breakfast and then a final visit to the park. We got the subway to 72nd Avenue and entered via Strawberry Fields opposite the Dakota Building.

Initially it seemed quiet, with a moderate northerly wind and cloudy conditions but soon we started to see warblers moving. First was a new species for our tour in this shape of a bright Wilson's Warbler, like a Yellow Warbler wearing a black skullcap. It was low in a flowering tree and allowed great views as it fed with a Common Yellowthroat. Next came another Worm-eating Warbler, then another and probably a third!! A bright male Scarlet Tanager added a splash of colour as did three blue Indigo Buntings feeding on elm flowers. The ever present Black & White Warblers dashed about the trees with multi-coloured Parula companions.

After about an hour of twisting around in circles watching warblers move through the trees, we walked down to Shakespeare Gardens to use the rest rooms and then up on the 'grassy knoll' to view the tree tops. This was beneficial as alongside the Redstarts and Magnolia Warblers, we found a nice male Blackpoll Warbler. Walking back towards Strawberry Fields, we encounter a number of thrushes, mainly Veery and Swainson's Thrush but also a brief view of a Hermit Thrush with its white eye ring and rusty tail.

Back at Strawberry Fields for the final check where a few saw an American Kestrel fly over and the Indigo Buntings and Scarlet Tanager were still present whereas the warblers had moved on. Unfortunately it was time to head back to the hotel to check-out for noon.

We gathered one last time over lunch in the Park Restaurant where the checklist was completed, and we had seen between us 119 species of birds, including 24 species of American warblers. After good conversation and ample food, we had a couple of hours to take in our final views of Manhattan before boarding taxis back to JFK for our flights home.

Day 8

Thursday 9th May

Arrival UK

Arrival back at UK airports.

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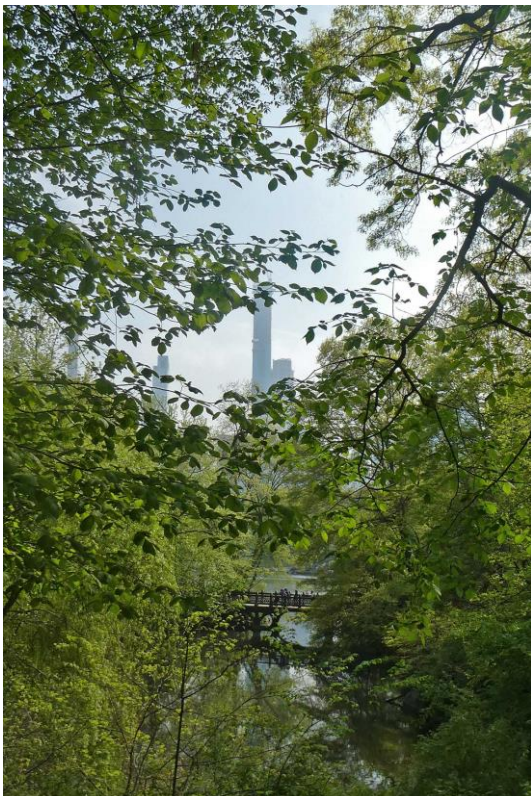
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Manhattan through the trees of Central Park



Black and White Warbler

Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May						
			2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Brant Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			✓		✓		
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		2	✓		✓	1	✓
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			2		✓		
4	Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>			✓				
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>					1		
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>					10	2	
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓		✓	5	✓
8	American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>					10		
9	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>					12		
10	Ruddy Duck	<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>			3		✓		
11	Great Northern Diver (Common Loon)	<i>Gavia immer</i>			1				
12	Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>		1					
13	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>					8		
14	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		1	3				
15	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>					1		1
16	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			1		✓	4	
17	Tricolored Heron	<i>Egretta tricolor</i>					1		
18	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>					4		
19	Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax auritus</i>		1	✓		✓	3	2
20	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					6		
21	Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>		1				3	
22	Clapper Rail	<i>Rallus crepitans</i>					H		
23	Sora	<i>Porzana carolina</i>					H		
24	American Coot	<i>Fulica americana</i>			1				
25	American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>					2		
26	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>					✓		
27	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>					✓		
28	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>					✓		
29	Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>					✓		
30	Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>		1	2				
31	Willet	<i>Tringa semipalmata</i>					6		
32	Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>					10		
33	Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>			7		✓		
34	Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>						1	
35	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>					2	✓	
36	American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	1	1	✓			✓	✓
37	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					✓		
38	Rock Dove (Feral)	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>		✓	✓			2	✓
40	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>					1		
41	Chimney Swift	<i>Chaetura pelagica</i>			2			5	
42	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	<i>Archilochus colubris</i>		1				1	
43	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>	2	5	3		1	2	
44	Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>		3	1			1	H
45	Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>			1				
46	Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>		3			1		
47	American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>							1

	Common name	Scientific name	May					
			2	3	4	5	6	7
48	Eastern Wood Pewee	<i>Contopus virens</i>						1
49	Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>			1			
50	Great Crested Flycatcher	<i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>		1			1	2
51	White-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo griseus</i>		1				
52	Yellow-throated Vireo	<i>Vireo flavifrons</i>			1			1
53	Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>	1	1	5		5	2
54	Warbling Vireo	<i>Vireo gilvus</i>		2	3			1
55	Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>						1
56	Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
57	Fish Crow	<i>Corvus ossifragus</i>					8	
58	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>						1
59	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>					4	
60	American Tree Swallow	<i>Tachycineta bicolor</i>					✓	
61	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓		✓	
62	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus calendula</i>		✓	3			3
63	House Wren	<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>			1			
64	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>			1			
65	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>			6		2	H
66	Grey Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
67	Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>					8	
68	Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>					2	
69	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
70	Veery	<i>Catharus fuscescens</i>			2			2
71	Swainson's Thrush	<i>Catharus ustulatus</i>			8			1
72	Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>		2	1			1
73	Wood Thrush	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>		1				
74	American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Purple Finch	<i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>		2	2			
77	House Finch	<i>Haemorhous mexicanus</i>	1	✓	1		6	
78	American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>		✓	✓			✓
79	Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>		1	1		✓	
80	Lincoln's Sparrow	<i>Melospiza lincolnii</i>						1
81	Swamp Sparrow	<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>						1
82	White-throated Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
83	Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>					6	
84	Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>	1	✓	3		2	4
85	Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>					1	
86	Eastern Towhee	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>			2		4	1
87	Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>		7	6			4
88	Orchard Oriole	<i>Icterus spurius</i>		1	1			
89	Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>		4	✓		✓	1
90	Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>		1	2		1	
91	Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Ovenbird	<i>Seiurus aurocapilla</i>	1	2	3			2
93	Worm-eating Warbler	<i>Helmitheros vermivorum</i>						1
94	Louisiana Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia motacilla</i>						1
95	Northern Waterthrush	<i>Parkesia noveboracensis</i>		5	4			5
96	Blue-winged Warbler	<i>Vermivora cyanoptera</i>	3		1			
97	Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	7	✓	✓		2	4
98	Nashville Warbler	<i>Leiothlypis ruficapilla</i>			1			

	Common name	Scientific name	May						
			2	3	4	5	6	7	8
99	Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	1	✓	4		1	3	✓
100	Hooded Warbler	<i>Setophaga citrina</i>		1					
101	American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>	8	✓	8		1	3	✓
102	Northern Parula	<i>Setophaga americana</i>	1	✓	4		4	5	5
103	Magnolia Warbler	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>		✓					4
104	Blackburnian Warbler	<i>Setophaga fusca</i>						1	
105	American Yellow Warbler	<i>Setophaga aestiva</i>		4	7		✓	3	2
106	Chestnut-sided Warbler	<i>Setophaga pensylvanica</i>			3			2	
107	Blackpoll Warbler	<i>Setophaga striata</i>							1
108	Black-throated Blue Warbler	<i>Setophaga caerulescens</i>	2	8	2			4	3
109	Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>		2					
110	Pine Warbler	<i>Setophaga pinus</i>			1				
111	Myrtle Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	2	
112	Yellow-throated Warbler	<i>Setophaga dominica</i>			1				
113	Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>	1	2	1			1	
114	Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Setophaga virens</i>		1	5				
115	Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>							1
116	Scarlet Tanager	<i>Piranga olivacea</i>	2		2		1	2	1
117	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>		2	2			1	
118	Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	3	✓	✓		1	5	✓
119	Indigo Bunting	<i>Passerina cyanea</i>		1	2			2	3

Mammals

1	Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
2	Eastern Chipmunk	<i>Tamias striatus</i>			1			✓	
3	Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>			2		1	1	
4	Common Raccoon	<i>Procyon lotor</i>	1						

Other Taxa

Common Snapping Turtle, *Chelydra serpentina*

Pond Slider, *Trachemys scripta*

American Lady, *Vanessa virginiensis*

Cloudless Sulphur, *Phoebastria sennae*

Painted Turtle, *Chrysemys picta*

American Bullfrog, *Lithobates catesbeianus*

Cabbage White, *Pieris rapae*



Veery