

Minnesota, Sept 2007

Minneapolis and Duluth

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While in Minnesota attending a conference in Minneapolis, I seized the opportunity to do some birding. Since I had a local birder kindly acting as my guide (found through the website www.birdingpal.com) I did not bother writing down detailed directions to the different places visited. However, the Duluth area is a popular and easily accessible birding area with short driving distances between the good spots. Maps and additional information is not hard to find on the internet. Therefore, this is more a "Species notes"-report to give a foreign birder in Minnesota a few hints on what to expect to find a day during the migration in September.

Saturday September 15th was spent together with local birder Mark Alt around Duluth, some 220km from Minneapolis and situated in the SW corner of Lake Superior. With good winds, Duluth can be crammed with warblers and other passerines and is also known for very good numbers of raptors heading south (certainly not this day though). The geographical position of the small town is favourable as the birds tend to follow the coastline southwest along Lake Superior during autumn. Most of the time was spent along the Park Point Recreation area which is part of a long sand dune water breaker between Lake Superior and Duluth Harbor. We also visited Indian Point by the St Louis River in western outskirts of Duluth, the West 40th St Marsh and finally made a short stop at Interstate Island looking for waders and gulls.. The day was partly cloudy and not much wind. Frost in the morning but temperatures up to 17-18°C in the afternoon.

In addition, I also had an afternoon of birding in Minnesota River Valley near the Black Dog Power Plant property on Thursday September 20th. A car is necessary to get around here. Unstable weather with thunderstorms and heavy rains coming in that evening.

Species notes

Pied-billed grebe, *Podilymbos podiceps*

10 in St Louis River at Indian Point, Duluth.

Red-necked grebe, *Podiceps grisagena*

1 still largely in summer plumage on Lake Superior, Park Point Reacreation Area (Duluth).

Double-crested cormorant, *Phal. auritus*

Common and widespread.

Canada goose, *Branta canadensis*

Common and widespread.

Cackling Goose, *Branta hutchinsii*

Clealy smaller and darker birds with shorter necks and stubby bills were seen on a few occasions and were thought to belong to this taxon.

Wood duck, *Aix sponsa*

1 pair Indian Point, several Loring Park, Minneapolis. Males dull looking.

American wigeon, *Anas americana*

25 at West 40th St Marsh (Duluth).

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common and widespread.

American black duck, *Anas rubripes*

2 birds Park Point Reacreation Area and 1 with mallards at Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Northern pintail, *Anas acuta*

10 at West 40th St Marsh.

Blue-winged teal, *Anas discors*

Fairly common and widespread with more than 100 seen.

Lesser scaup, *Athya affinis*

1 pair Indian Point.

Common merganser, *Mergus merganser*

Fairly common on Lake Superior.

Great white egret, *Egretta alba*

20+ along the river near Black Dog Power Plant property.

Great blue heron, *Ardea herodias*

Widespread in small numbers.

Green heron, *Butorides virescens*

2 Loring Park, Minneapolis

Turkey vulture, *Cathartes aura*

10+ seen around Duluth and 2 birds Minneapolis.

Bald eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

1 adult Park Point Recreation Area, up to 5 of various ages soaring over St Louis river, Indian Point and 1 adult near Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Northern harrier, *Circus cyaneus hudsonius*

1 bird, presumably 1k, Indian Point. Notably darker and more contrasting plumage than a European Hen Harrier.

Red-tailed hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*

Noted along the road south of Duluth and outside Minneapolis. All light morphs.

Merlin, *Falco columbarius*

7-8 birds seen in the Duluth area, 1 south of Duluth and 1 Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley. Probably of "Tundra" population (i.e. not notably pale).

Wild Turkey, *Melagris gallopavo*

A group of 4 seen crossing the road near Black Dog Power Plant property.

American coot, *Fulica americana*

1 bird Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago delicata*

2 flushed and 1 feeding at West 40th St Marsh. Very little white on remiges in flight.

Sanderling, *Calidris alba*

2+2 West 40th St Marsh.

Least sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*

15+ juv. West 40th St Marsh.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*

2 juv. West 40th St Marsh.

Baird's Sandpiper, *Calidris bairdi*

5-6 juv. West 40th St Marsh.

Pectoral Sandpiper, *Calidris melanotos*

4-5 juveniles West 40th St Marsh. 1 Interstate Island.

Stilt sandpiper, *Micropalama himantopus*

1 juv. Park Point Recreation, 5 juv. West 40th St Marsh.

Long-billed dowitcher, *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

3 juv. Southworth Marsh (Duluth). Also heard a few times.

Ruddy turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*

1 Superior Beach (Duluth) and 1 Interstate Island (Duluth).

Semipalmated plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus*

5-6 West 40th St Marsh.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*

Totally 5-6 birds in the Duluth area.

Grey plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

2 imm/winter, 40th St. marsh, Duluth.

American golden plover, *Pluvialis dominica*

4 birds at decent distance on the ground, Park Point Recreation Area and one overflying (and calling). Interstate Island.

Ring-billed gull, *Larus delawarensis*

Abundant in the Duluth/Lake Superior area. Hundreds around Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley. A few noted in central Minneapolis.

Franklin's Gull, *Larus pipixcan*

1 ad (or 2k+) and 1 1k Minnesota River Valley.

American herring gull, *Larus (argentatus)*

smithsonianus

Widespread in small numbers in the Duluth/Lake Superior area and Minnesota River Valley.

Caspian tern, *Sterna caspia*

1 adult Indian Point, 5-10 Interstate Island.

Common tern, *Sterna hirundo*

3-4 Superior Beach and another 30-35 Interstate Island.

Great northern loon, *Gavia immer*

2-3 birds on Lake Superior in Duluth. At least 1 adult in summer plumage.

Feral pigeon, *Columba livia*

Common in urban areas.

American mourning dove, *Zenaida macroura*

Some 10 birds totally in the Duluth and Minneapolis areas.

Chimney swift, *Chaetura pelagica*

2 (apparently fairly late) birds Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Ruby-throated hummingbird, *Archilochus colubris*

1 immature feeding on flowers in a garden at Park Point Recreation Area. Most are gone by this time of year.

Belted kingfisher, *Ceryle alcyon*

1 West 40th St marsh.

Northern flicker, *Colaptes auratus*

1 Park Point Recreation Area, 1 at camping grounds Indian Point and 1 Minneapolis airport.

Yellow-bellied sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus varius*

3 Park Point Recreation Area (of which at least 1 adult and 1 juvenile)

Pileated woodpecker, *Dryocopus pileatus*

1 flying over the road on the way back from Duluth.

Downy woodpecker, *Dendrocopus pubescens*

1 by Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Hairy woodpecker, *D. villosus*

4-5 birds in the Duluth area. Fairly easily distinguished from previous species by size and bill shape.

Eastern Phoebe, *Sayornis phoebe*

2 birds (of which 1 newly fledged) by West 40th St marsh. Flycatchers otherwise mostly gone by this time of year.

Blue jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*

50+ migrating birds Duluth.

American crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Common and widespread.

Raven, *C. corax*

Small numbers around and en route south of Duluth.

Cedar waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*

2-3 briefly at Indian Point.

Swainson's thrush, *Catharus ustulatus*

6-8 birds Park Point Recreation Area. Often in gardens.

American robin *Turdus migratorius*

Small numbers around Duluth. 1 central Minneapolis.

Grey catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis*

1 Indian Point.

White-breasted nuthatch, *Sitta carolinensis*

1 Indian Point.

Tree swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*

10+ over Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Barn swallow, *Hirundo rustica*

35+ Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*

2 Park Point Recreation Area, 10+ Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Black-capped chickadee, *Parus atricapillus*

Common everywhere around Duluth.

House sparrow, *Passer domesticus*

Fairly common. Not only urban.

Buff-bellied pipit, *Anthus rubescens*

A group with 25+ at a distance, West 40th St. marsh and 5+ birds flying overhead, Interstate Island.

American goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis*

Noted in small numbers around Duluth.

Purple finch, *Carpodacus purpureus*

1 Park Point Recreation Area, Duluth.

Nashville warbler, *Vermivora ruficapilla*

25+ birds in the Duluth area, 1 Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley. (1-2 dark birds with faded eye-rings were possibly Ruby-crowned Warblers)

Tennessee warbler, *Vermivora peregrina*

4-5 Park Point Recreation Area, 1 Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Northern parula, *Parula americana*

1 Park Point Recreation Area, 1 Indian Point.

Yellow-rumped warbler, *Dendroica coronata*

By 10-fold outnumbering all other warblers, probably 500+ birds noted all together.

Magnolia warbler, *Dendroica magnolia*

2 Park Point Recreation Area, Duluth.

Palm warbler, *Dendroica palmarum*

25+ Duluth area and 10+ Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley. Often feeding on the ground.

Chestnut-sided warbler, *Dendroica pensylvanica*

2 presumed juveniles Indian Point.

Blackpoll warbler, *Dendroica striata*

5-6 birds in the Duluth area. All in immature/winter plumage.

Black-and-white warbler, *Mniotilta varia*

4-5 birds in the Duluth area. 1 Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

American redstart, *Setophaga ruticilla*

Totally 4-5 birds in the Duluth area.

Song sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*

Small numbers Park Point Recreation Area. Several 40th St. marsh and 2-3 by Black Dog Power Plant property, Minnesota River Valley.

Lincoln's sparrow, *Melospiza lincolnii*

2 Park Point Recreation Area, 2 birds 40th St. marsh. An additional 3-4 probables also noted.

White-throated sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*

Widespread in small numbers, also in urban areas.

Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*

3 in winter plumage in reeds at 40th St. marsh, Duluth.

Common grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula*

Widespread in small numbers Duluth and central Minneapolis.

Rusty blackbird, *Euphagus carolinus*

Group with 10+ birds at 40th St. marsh.

Red-winged blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Small numbers noted at most places visited.

Other animals:

1 Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) in central Minneapolis and a few White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) near Duluth and along the Minnesota River Valley are perhaps worth mentioning.