

Young Birder of the Year Contest

Field Notebook Module

Entries from the Notebooks of: _____

ELISE M. S. BECKER • NEIL GILBERT • TOM JOHNSON • LUKE SEITZ • NOAH STRYCKER • LAUREN THEAD

The ABA, in its vital aim to foster young people's interest in birding, has been conducting the Young Birder of the Year contest for some time now. The contest consists of four separate modules, each judged separately. I had the good fortune to be a judge for the Field Notebook Module, and I was frankly amazed. There are some incredibly skilled and superbly motivated young birders out there. The notebooks ranged from diaries about birding and birds to comprehensive notes on individual sightings with gorgeous illustrations and superb detail on even obscure field marks. Hey, I was taking notes from these young birders' field notes! I am so glad that you are able to sample here from these notebooks: As you will see, the pages are just filled with the love of birds, in a raw, intense, and youthful way.

The dedication and time, not to mention observational skill, that it took to put these notebooks together are inspiring. Indeed, I felt privileged to have been given permission to look at them. Part of the great learning for me was to sometimes see myself, and my own early birding experiences, in these books. I thank the participants for allowing me to re-live those earlier days of birding. I even pulled out my own early notes in a fit of nostalgia. As we become more experienced as birders, we forget what it was like to be starting out, as a new or young birder. We tend to think that we follow a linear progression wherein each day we become more experienced, perhaps better. Seeing these books allowed me to understand that we actually change as birders while we change as people. We have a lot to learn from the young birders, from their dedication to learn, from their full-blown zest for birding, and from the time and effort to take down notes in the field. It is something we should all be doing. How many of us can remember 10, 20, 30, or more years back when we were starting out and that "Christmas morning" feeling every time we were in the field seeing lifer after lifer? I know we influence the young birders, and many notebooks have sightings structured much like rare bird reports that may be submitted to a rarities committee. But the point I want to make here is this: Let these young birders influence you, with their note-taking skills, artwork, and passion for our hobby. Let them take you back to a time in your birding when nothing was run of the mill, when everything was new and interesting.

This contest is part of a process in which we, the older birders, seek to encourage the young contestants and help to develop their skills so that they may achieve greater experience and acuity in the pursuit of birding. But after seeing the notebooks, it is clear that they are quintessential birders already, devoted and hungry to learn, every day, about birds. We older birders should be more like them. Maybe we should be the contestants and the young birders the judges? Thanks for the journey, contestants. It is a joy to have your observational skills and your passion in our birding community.

— Alvaro Jaramillo
Half Moon Bay, California

Date 9/24 Time 10:00-2:30 pm Weather Sunny & warm
 Location Fountain Creek Federal Cart
 1 Red-billed Grebe
 17 American White Pelican
 2 Double-crested Cormorant
 1 Great Blue Heron
 2+ Canada Goose
 7+ American Widgeon
 17+ Mallard
 3+ Teal (Green-winged Teal)
 1 Male Hooded Merganser
 1 Cooper's Hawk
 1 Red-tailed Hawk
 1 American Coot
 1 Spotted Sandpiper
 1 Mourning Dove
 2 Belted Kingfisher (1 dead on water)
 1 Red Naped Sapsucker
 1 Downy Woodpecker
 5+ Northern Flicker (red-shafted)
 3 Black capped Chickadee
 1 White Breasted Nuthatch
 1 Red Breasted Nuthatch
 5+ American Robin
 10+ European Starling
 3+ Wilson's Warbler

From the field notebook of
© Elise M. S. Becker, age 12.

Date _____ Time _____ Weather _____
 Location _____
 1 Spotted Towhee (heard)
 7+ Chipping Sparrow
 1 Lincoln's Sparrow
 5 Red-winged Blackbird
 (in cattails)
 1 Common Grackle
 3+ House Finch
 20+ Lesser Goldfinch
 32 Total Species
 Lincoln's Sparrow
 rufous crown
 rufous eyestripe
 sub-nuchal stripe (buff)
 malar stripe (rufous)
 Chipping Sparrow
 buff
 faint white eyering
 brownish malar stripe
 buff ear coverts



Neil Gilbert Red-bellied Woodpecker (RBWO)
 Date 9/21/04 Time 4:20 p.m. Weather Clear, Cool, m72°
 Location My yard in Beverly Hills, MI
 - large bill
 - head & underparts
 - black and white tail
 - grey legs
 - striped back & wings
 - grey face & underparts
 - black and white tail
 - red on nape
 - striped back & wings
 - black and white tail
 On 9/21/04 ~ 4:20 p.m. I observed two RBWOs in a large, dead maple. One was an adult ♀, and the other was a juvenile. The ♀ was foraging on a large limb ~ 40 feet high. The juvenile followed, begging. The begging was a hoarse, "wheezing, chick chick!" The juvenile was capable

From the field notebook of
© Neil Gilbert, age 11.

8-20-04 1330-1700 Outercoast, South S. 75°F
 Katama Airpark, Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, MA

looked for the Red-footed Falcon w/ mom
 (1st North American Record)

My mom + I caught the 130 PM ferry from Falmouth to
 Oakes Bluff, then grabbed a taxi to Katama. The bird was
 present from when we arrived @ 1500 until 1630, when
 we caught a ride back to Oakes Bluff w/ Bill + Pauline
 Fen of SC.

RFFO Notes

- observed flying + sitting, the falcon was hunting + eating all
 of afternoon... flying on shallow windbeats, then hovering + diving
 into the grass of the airfield to catch insects
- habits reminiscent of AMKE, but longer overall
- a study in grays, with a slate back and light
 underparts w/ light brown streaks - wings barred gray
 with some rufous in underwing coverts - some adult gray
 underwing coverts were apparent w/ the banded juvenile feathers.
- head gray, with very dark helmet @ face - bill
 bright gold/orange w/ black tip
- legs + feet deep red/orange, with rusty "stockings"
- barred brown/grey tail molting central ribs
- inner primaries appeared black - new molt-in

GPS coordinates: N 41° 21.643' W 70° 31.501'
 Red-footed Falcon
 Katama, MA

The RFFO was
 catching insects,
 mostly grasshoppers
 at a small-craft
 airfield
 area down
 with
 brush

airfield signpost

wings
 each
 w/ tail
 area pushed

barred gray underwing coverts
 w/ some uniform
 gray adult feathers
 (for separation
 from Lesser
 Falcon); very
 hard to see
 this mark
 in the
 field

inner
 primary
 molt

very long tail

central tail
 feathers molting

rufous
 underwing
 coverts
 + "stockings"

bright
 red/orange
 feet

All plumage details
 matched with those of
 a bird just over one
 year in age - this male
 is beginning to acquire
 adult plumage

From the field notebook of
 © Tom Johnson, age 16.

• adult male breeding RUFF (RUFF) approx 12:50 PM

Seen at about 2:00 pm. Present for about 1/2 hr
 sketched from memory and my digital photo just after
 observation

brilliant bird
 habitat = saltmarsh

black ear
 tufts and
 head

white patch at
 base of bill

black back

rufous and
 black
 pattern
 on wing

bricolored bill,
 yellow-orange and
 black

rufous colored ruff,
 patchy

short tail

yellow-orange legs

off-white belly, with
 large black spots

slightly smaller than Greater Yellowlegs

very pretty,
 also very rare,
 not seen in
 Maine for
 2-3 years

white and dark brown
 on tail

yellow-orange legs

This bird was spotted
 very early in May before
 Herring Gulls at Blackbird
 Pond. It was seen
 a number of times
 after that and I
 saw it on the Maine
 Audubon Birdathon.

From the field notebook of
 © Luke Seitz, age 11.

DARK MORPH ADULT SWAINSON'S HAWK!
 West Eugene, Greenhill/Meadowview roads, 9/16/04
 Cloudy, cool 2:45 PM

A rare bird report came through on the listserve today of a SWAINSON'S HAWK in west Eugene, very rare in our area (code 5). I ran out to look for it this afternoon, and was amazed to find a dark morph! Great views, cool bird. sketched from memory same day

I did not see this bird take flight or hear it vocalize.



From the field notebook of
 © Noah Strycker, age 18.

9-3-04 Lauren Thead 11:00 am
Sketch or Photo



sketched in field; colored in water, some day from memory
 Common Name Ruby-throated Hummingbird
 Latin Name Archilochus colubris

From the field notebook of
 © Lauren Thead, age 17.

Lauren Thead (off work) about 9:45 am
 Date 9-3-04 Time 5:00 pm Weather 10:30 am - humid, partly cloudy; rained in afternoon
 Location MS; Lauderdale Co; 4 miles north of Marietta
 Notes mixed woods, pond, thickets, feeders
 Birds: Turkey Vulture; 2
 Red-shouldered Hawk; 2 calling
 Mourning Dove; 12
 Chimney Swift; 4
 Ruby-thr. Hummingbird; approx. 30
 Downy Woodpecker; 2
 E. Wood-Pewee; 4
 Eastern Phoebe; 1 adult
 White-eyed Vireo; 2 singing
 Blue Jay; approx. 20
 American Crow; 3
 Purple Martin; 4 flying overhead
 Tufted Titmouse; 2
 Carolina Chickadee; 2
 Carolina Wren; 1
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; 6
 Northern Mockingbird; 1
 Brown Thrasher; 2
 Northern Cardinal; 6 (3♀, 3♂)
 House Finch; 2
 Butterflies: Red-spotted Purple; 1
 Cloudless Sulphur; 1