

Birding Trip to Lake Cassidy/Gardner Lake

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By David Droppers

The forecast for Veteran's Day had several participants, understandably, bowing out of the trip. Lying awake the previous night, listening to the wind howl, my expectations dropped regarding our anticipated birding experience.

It is a wonderful feeling to be so wrong! The rain held off, only sprinkling on occasion, as we walked to Lake Cassidy, and the breeze was slight. Much of the walk was quiet since most of the birds have abandoned their territories at this point in favor of teaming up for winter protection. When we encountered these flocks, there was a flurry of activity, including great views of the often heard but not often seen Golden-crowned Kinglets. Highlights on the walk included a group of cooperative and bright Varied Thrushes foraging trailside. Getting dive-bombed by a large flock of Siskins and an Accipiter buzzing past added more excitement.

Lake Cassidy was oddly sparse with birds, although the 3 Ruddy Ducks were a great find. A mystery duck, however, still has me scratching my head. It was floating with two Ruddy Ducks, with its head often tucked away. Brief glimpses showed this bird to be largely dark, with a discrete white crescent behind its eye. The group looked it over again and again, considered all possible ducks, but just couldn't come up with a satisfying option. Further research at home came up with a Garganey as the most probable candidate, based on that white crescent, but the body was dark, not bi-colored as with usual Garganey. A sign about the area described a nearby Northwest Wildfowl Farm, indicating that it may have been an exotic escapee. Further research revealed that the farm has been closed for years! A true mystery! Of course, it did not help that the bird was on the opposite side of the lake!

Traveling further to Gardner Lake in Granite Falls, the rain picked up, but then petered out after about 5 minutes, another lucky stroke to the weather. Many more waterfowl were found on this lake than at Lake Cassidy, and the trails at the park proved more extensive than expected. Many species of fungi also put on a quiet show along the trails.

All in all, the 3 participants had a quite satisfying day, and netted 30 species for the half-day trip, 23 at Lake Cassidy, and 15 at Gardner Lake.