

Birding Trip to Bob Heirman Wildlife Preserve

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By David Droppers

A brisk but sunny morning promised good things when I stepped out of the car at the Bob Heirman Wildlife Preserve. No rain in November? I'll take it! The resounding calls of Trumpeter Swans from below raised hopes of a good day.

Four birders in total trekked through the wildlife preserve, uncovering 41 species before the end of a little after noon. The highlight was definitely Shadow Lake with towards 100 Trumpeter Swans and a handful of Tundras, along with several species of ducks: American Coots, Pied-billed Grebes, and one female Hooded Merganser keeping to herself. Scans within the flock failed to turn up an Eurasian Wigeon. For those who wish to visit Shadow Lake, take the second trail on your left, just as you hit the bottom of the hill – the first trail is usually unpleasantly muddy.

Another highlight was the distinctive call of a Greater Yellowlegs in the pond opposite of Shadow Lake. Unfortunately, the area was flooded, so we weren't able to get close and lay eyes on the bird. But this was the first time I've ever detected Yellowlegs in this area.

The birding along the river was a little more lackluster than usual. Usually hosting a dozen Goldeneyes and more Common Mergansers, this time there were only 2 Common Mergansers. The smell of rotting salmon along the shorelines didn't really make us want to wait either. On the way back, the makers of the several different bird and mammal tracks in the shoreline distracted our minds, as well as the constant flocks of Snow and Cackling Geese traveling above.

The area sports some serious Skagit Flats vibes, which is great for those who want to see swans and wintering birds without the long drive north. The area is lacking in raptors though, since the hydrology of the area usually leaves little high ground for the small mammals that attract them. The open fields just look like there should be a harrier or Short-eared Owl cruising low.