23 May 2019

Dear Earlhamites,

Earlham College Birding Big Day 2019 is now just a few weeks behind us. Wendy is already off to Italy, where she and her husband are opening the minds and hearts of a group of Earlham’s first generation college students to the wonderful experience of international travel. Immediately after Italy, Wendy travels to Tanzania to join Brent Smith with a different group of students on an EPIC program studying wildlife and human geography in East Africa. Two weeks after that trip, she heads off to Papua, New Guinea to work as a field assistant for her former student, Kasun Bodawatta ’15. She is taking two current students with her to participate in this research experience. Wendy’s energy for and joy in providing students with these important and incredible experiences is astounding.

I’m back here in Richmond, pulling together this year’s ECBBD results and not regretting it one bit. Not only is the successful weekend fresh in my memory, but so is the wonderful three-week alumni trip Marianne and I just had to Morocco and southern Spain!

The Big Day results are in hand, and what fun was had! Globally, our composite tally was 658 species – that is up from last year, but below the 5-year average of 676. Our U.S. total was only 419 compared to our 5-year average of 436.

Year to year, our global total is highly variable as individual observers may not be in the same regions, and countries that are different biologically contribute lots of species. This year we had international lists from the Andaman Islands of India (95 species observed by Paul Ode ’86), Costa Rica (77 by Ricardo Guindon ’83), Spain (75 by Blanca Perez, Katherine Muller ’83 and Wally Shriner), Denmark (56 by Kasun Bodwatta ’15, and Canada (2 at Vancouver Airport stopover by Skip Russell ’80). Paul sent in six amazing lists from the little known and faunally distinctive Andaman Islands (lots of endemics), Ricardo sent in three rich lists from Monteverde – birds, and places that are my personal favorites from my doctoral work 40 years ago.

Blanca Perez, an ornithologist who works with “Birdingthestrait,” was recruited by alumni when she was our guide in southern Spain. Her work on the ECBBD took her into the Strait of Gibraltar where she found pelagics like Great Skua, Pomarine Jaegers, Atlantic Puffin, Cory’s and Balearic Shearwaters and onshore found songbirds like Sardinian Warbler, Common Nightingale, Spotless Starling, Greater Short-toed Lark, etc. Also, in Spain were Katherine and Wally who were trekking/birding El Camino. India, Puerto Rico and Canada were new countries for the ECBBD. Stephanie Lane ’04 reported three incidental sightings while working on a project at Luquillo Beach in Puerto Rico with her group of kids from the Bronx.
After years with Oregon or California leading the states in the number of species, the geography changed. Ohio far and away led the pack with 186. Indiana was the runner up with 141. While Wendy and I contributed to these two state lists, Ohio benefitted greatly from the submissions by Andrew Hood ’15, Margaret Vimmerted ’81 with husband Lorenz Hintz, and John Barber ’75. Andrew registered 36,000 steps (16 miles) on his Fitbit in a day, and he seemed to cover most of the state over the weekend. Indiana’s list was helped by Richard Wiesler’s ’80 total of 126 species plus others from Brenna Hellman ’19.

A surprise was that Alaska came in sixth based on reports from four observers: Paul Foreman ’89, Matt Klostermann ’04, Quinn Smith ’04, and Ann Wildman ’83.

To see a summary of totals by state please go to earlham.edu/birdingbigday.

You can read more about this year’s birding adventures through the Earlham Birders Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/earlhambirders.

Thanks to all of you for a successful Big Day to raise support for Earlham. Your contributions are important to the College as it works to be the highly effective place you knew and know it to be. Greetings to all who have joined in this year — it is highly meaningful to be in touch through our shared interests.

We continue to use Liza Donnelly’s ’77 logo for our mailings, enduring thanks to her. Thanks also to Sarah Ramos in the Alumni Relations Office for all her help keeping us organized. Wendy and I would like to give a special shout out of appreciation to Jonathan ’80 and Dotty ’79 Doherty and to Becky Evans Marvil ’80 and many others for all their help with this party!

Sincerely,

Bill ’66

Wendy