

Birder's enthusiasm is infectious

Sue Barth is a website developer who works at her Orchard Park home. From where she sits at her computer, she has an excellent view of her attractive yard and several bird feeders. Always interested in nature, Sue decided in 2010 to formalize that interest. She developed a blog titled "Chirps and Cheeps" and began to keep a life list of the birds she saw, photographing them as well.

I first was led to her website a few days ago and have been captivated. I'll draw upon her writing to introduce it – and incidentally to let Sue write this column. An interesting feature of Sue's blog is its progression as she becomes a more confident birder. Here are two of her first entries:

"Oct. 8, 2010: I ventured off to Tift Nature Preserve today. It's been about 15 years since I've been there. It's still a terrific place to view nature in its untouched form, although there are a few indications of man's intervention – all for the good of the preserve.

"I hadn't even gotten into the park when I spied my first warbler, and I mean my very first, life-list warbler. As an examination of my photos later showed, this guy was a yellow-rumped warbler. He was perched up in a pine tree near the entrance of the park, flitting from branch to branch. I'm thrilled I got at least one identifiable photo.

"Nov. 16, 2010: What a treat today brought. I've been preparing my bird friends to eat from my hand by leaving a gardener's glove of seed out on our deck railing. It's close to the feeders and eventually, birds began to accept that purple glove as a regular deck accent and pick at the seeds in its palm. (This was all my son Tom's idea.)

"So the next step was to try enticing the birds to eat from my hand with the glove on. But today, impatient as I am, I



This red-headed woodpecker was one of two spotted near the sledding hill in Como Park over the summer.

Sue Barth

just went ahead and skipped that step, anxious to see if they would comply. Sure enough, a little male red-breasted nuthatch obliged – and not only once, but he came back to my bare hand several times. I had expected a chickadee to be first."

And here are two recent entries:

"June 14: Joe Mitchell reported a pair of red-headed woodpeckers at Como Park the other day. I decided to take advantage of the late daylight and head out there this evening to see if I could find them. I was rewarded with some lovely views of the pair. They were just where he said they'd be, near the sledding hill. Thanks, Joe.

"Sept. 3: How to get these little guys to come to me? They're not seed eaters, so what can I offer them? I had an inspiration: water. It's been such a hot summer, why not provide a little sprinkler action and a makeshift pool? So the next day I got the hose and sprinkler, a big pan lid, and some stones to make my little bird 'pool.' I also set up my photo blind close by and sat down to watch what would happen.

"Wow, I hadn't sat for more than 10 minutes when the first warbler showed up: a young Wilson's warbler – a lifer. Soon to follow was a black-throated green warbler, and then another life-list addition, a Philadelphia vireo. What fun."

One of the great pleasures senior birders have is watching beginners develop their life lists. In doing so, we can replay our own early experiences. We can see this in Sue's posted list. Like many beginners, she started with a number of birds she already knew like robin, Baltimore oriole and crow. But the third species she added, starling, identified her as a beginning list keeper. Her latest entry, an ovenbird, already brings her total to 128 species.

Sue's enthusiasm is infectious. Her children, Tom and Kate, and now even her young grandchildren, Josh and Will, are "into birding." Visit her blog at www.chirpsandcheeps.com. But beginners beware: She'll soon have you compiling your own life list.

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