

Try for big day

BY BRIAN DALZELL

On August 13, 1984, two birders from California recorded a total of 100 species of birds in a single day on P.E.I. Last year, Stuart Tingley from New Brunswick and Blake Maybank from Newfoundland eclipsed that record with 105 species on Aug. 21.

This year, on August 27, Rob Walker and myself struck out to try and set yet another record for the most species of birds observed on the Island in one day. Rob is the chief park naturalist at Fundy National Park in New Brunswick and I am currently a student at Holland College in Charlottetown, having lived in Moncton most of my life.

Just what is a big day you ask? Well, it originated in 1971 under the auspices of the American Birding Association and its publication, BIRDING. The idea is for a team of no more than four birders to record as many species as possible in one 24-hour period in a state or province of their choosing.

The tricky part is that all members of the team must see or hear at least 95% of the total species recorded. This requires staying within unamplified earshot of each other and making sure everybody else is informed of the presence of a bird that you alone may have sighted.

Rob and I decided to start our day at North Cape, which is where the other teams started, and work our way down the Island as far as the National Park. Neither of us had ever been to that part of the province before, but we were confident our map reading abilities would see us to our destination.

We planned to camp overnight at Anglo-Tignish Provincial Park, which Stuart Tingley assured us was a good spot to stay. It may well have been, but Stuart neglected to tell us that it had been ten years since last he was

there. We drove past the park three times in the dark before we found it, and then discovered it had closed at 9 p.m. and camping was not longer allowed.

We ended up staying in a field next to the park, but because someone forgot the tent poles, one of us had to spend the night under the stars while the other slept in the back of the truck. Being the nice guy (or fool) that I was, I opted for the great outdoors.

Wednesday dawned cool and partly cloudy and I didn't miss a bit of it because, for any number of reasons -- cold, dampness, hard ground, crashing surf, etc., -- sleep had eluded me.

Rob, his usual bright and cheery self, offered his regrets on my rough night and said I could sleep in the back of the truck next time...if there

