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Cornell birding team gets top honors

By Linda Stout

Journal Staff

ITHACA — The Cornell University Lab of Ornithology staff's Team Sapsucker returned with another championship after identifying 230 birds Saturday at the World Series of Birding in New Jersey.

Team Sapsucker consisted of Chris Wood, Steve Kelling, Ken Rosenberg, John Fitzpatrick and Brian Sullivan, the same team that won last year's event. This year's team won two awards — the Urner Stone Cup, for highest number of total species identified, and the Ed Stearns Award for highest total species for a non-resident team.

The Cornell team won the same two awards last year, and also raised the most money for bird conservation. This year's total of 230 birds — identified in a 24-hour period starting at midnight Friday — was one more than the team's record total, set last year, and one shy of the overall record for the event.

For the first time, a five-member student team from Cornell, the Redheads, tromped through multiple habitats watching and listening for birds. They competed in the Limited Geographic Area division, searching exclusively in Cape May County, on the southern tip of the state. The Redheads finished second in their division with 174 birds, 10 fewer than the MOS Yellowthroats, from the Maryland Ornithological Society.

Redheads captain Ben Winger, a Cornell senior, said both Cornell teams scouted their respective areas for five days prior to the event.

"The first bird we heard was a marsh wren, right at midnight," he said. Others on the student team included Scott Haber, Glenn Seeholzer, Jay McGowan and Shawn Billerman.

Many birders start young, Winger said. He had his first birding experience at 12 on a vacation in Wyoming, when a family friend handed him a field guide and he identified a Clark's Nutcracker when it flew across the trail. He was hooked. He chose Cornell because it has one of the top ornithology programs in the world.

Part of the reason the student team went was to earn money for undergraduate ornithology research, he said. Team Sapsucker expects to exceed the \$2 million mark in pledges, which go to the Lab of Ornithology's conservation programs, said Pat Leonard, who works for the lab.

Winger said some World Series of Birding members described strange sensations when they went to bed, sleep-deprived, after the event.

"You hallucinate bird songs, and then you close your eyes, and you start seeing birds," he said. "You've been concentrating so hard on these birds for 24 hours. It's really strange."

on the Net

\* To read more about the Lab of Ornithology's involvement in the World Series of Birding, visit:

[www.birds.cornell.edu/wsb](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/wsb)

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