



CU Maurice River Fish Hawks, from left: Tony Klock, Kathy Michel, Mary Watkins, and James Blumestein.

World Series...

Baseball? No, but the 2019 World Series of Birding occurs each May. And the CU Maurice River Team, as always, has global significance.

The World Series of Birding is the most famous birding competition in the world, and it takes place right here in New Jersey. The idea for the event came from one of the country's most renowned birders, Pete Dunne (of Mauricetown), who says he and Roger Tory Peterson were brainstorming and the idea emerged from their conversation. The first year for the event was 1984.

The object of the competition is to identify the highest number of species in a 24-hour time period. The competition begins at midnight on a Friday evening and ends 24

hours later. There's a lot of strategy in accumulating a robust list of birds: primarily the planning of a good route. So choosing to begin at a good location for finding night birds in the wee hours is an important factor. Most teams select marshy areas with woodland edge, hoping to get rails, owls, and nightjars. For the dawn songs you need a woods that has great migrant habitat. Mid-day is often spent on beaches, ponds for ducks, and back to the marshes for daytime denizens. The truly competitive teams try to capture the evening birds before the 24-hour clock runs out, but many experienced birders stop at 7 p.m. Some may quit when they know they have exhausted their regional prospects. Of course, this is an oversimplification of what it takes to win. It requires great birding skill and a *good ear*, since accomplished birders often identify birds just by listening. Each species has a unique song or group of songs, and the best competitors can tell a species by a single chip note.

The event is held at the height of spring migration. Year-round birds and spring migrants are the likely targets, as birds that only winter here have moved on. Members of the team must confirm sightings or songs with their other teammates and for a tally.

Most importantly, this competition raises dollars for conservation. NJ Audubon has

teams in the event and other groups pay an entry fee to participate. NJ Audubon's coordination effort is a huge undertaking.; conservation groups from all over NJ and teams from all over the world compete. And each raises money based on contributions to their team from their supporters, who donate either a flat amount or so many cents or dollars per bird identified.

There are lots of complex rules for this competition - maybe not as complex as baseball but believe me, complex! For example, birders have to abide by American Bird Association Principles of Birding Ethics. The designated driver cannot assist beyond going where he is told. If someone leaves the team for health reasons he or she can't rejoin it. Each team MUST stick together, so that they can each be heard by the others without raising their voices. And one of the most important standards is the 95% rule. Ninety-five percent of the birds must be identified by ALL members of the team.

At CU Maurice River our first forays were in 2007 and 08, and we have had a team every year since 2012. The dollars raised by our Fish Hawks go toward our avian projects and nature awareness. For example, for 31 years we have supported a study involving a survey of waterfowl and raptors on the Maurice River. More recently it has expanded to include

shorebird activity at the mouth of the river. In addition, our Director of Wildlife Management, Allen Jackson, has partnered with the NJ Bluebird Association and Purple Martin Society such that over 8,000 chicks are reared in local martin gourds, and bluebirds fledged last year exceeded 3,600! We also have an osprey platform colony that we manage, with nearly 100 chicks fledging last year from those structures. At WheatonArts we have been conducting projects to heighten visitors' awareness about nesting box programs and overall backyard stewardship. So these dollars are crucial to our programming at CU, and we and many other conservation organizations are grateful to NJ Audubon for having conceived of the World Series of Birding and for enabling us to use it as a platform to garner support.

This year we once again had a top-notch team of experts, with Mary Watkins returning as our captain. Joined by Anthony Klock, Kathy Michel, and James Blumstein, they tallied the super count of 144. We confine our search to Cumberland and Cape May Counties, competing against teams that cover the entire state. There are limited-area groups birding a single county, but since we include two we are in the statewide competition. Why is that, you might ask. Well, our team has been driving home the point that our NJ Delaware Bayshore

region is a superb birding destination, and is truly one of the Last Great Places on Earth as defined by The Nature Conservancy. It has dozens of national and international designations for its rich natural history. Yes, a topic for another story. For now, join me in congratulating our team on an amazing effort and an amazing list. (And it is never too late to join our group of supporters! Donations can be sent to CU Maurice River, PO Box 474, Millville, NJ 08332.)



This year's T-shirt design