

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2016, 6 A.M.

Birder sets record, 753, for Big Year list, and 2016's still young



BIRDING -- An American ex-pat who resides in Australia was in Washington state last weekend when he pushed his list to 753 and broke the record for the number of bird species tallied for a Big Year in North America.

John Weigel added five more species to his list to eclipse Neil Hayward's 2013 record of birds.

The record was set with sightings of black swift and the Vaux's swift in Idaho, the gray (Hungarian) partridge in Washington and the Buller's shearwater and red knot in California.

Weigel's record-breaking total includes 89 rare species, two of which may not have been seen before in North America—the Cuban vireo in Florida and the pine flycatcher in Arizona.

Weigel broke the Big Year record for Australia in 2012.

His Big Year has taken him across North America, from the remote Attu Island in Alaska to the southern tip of Florida. Along the way he is raising awareness and funds for [Global Wildlife Conservation](#) partner [Devil Ark](#), a breeding program for the endangered Tasmanian devil.

Weigel's adventures have so far taken him to 23 states and two Canadian provinces. He found the most bird species in Texas (174), Arizona (131) and Florida (93), with the most rare species in Alaska (19). He attributes his success to the El Niño conditions that have resulted in an influx of rare birds.

Though Weigel has beaten the record, now he aims to end the year as the recordholder, he races a small group of other dedicated [Big Year birders](#).

GWC is tracking Weigel's progress on an [interactive story map](#) and he shares stories on [his blog](#).

"This is a sweet moment, and follows a very long and arduous process of tracking down many birds in so many places," Weigel said in a GWC media release. "Since it's so early in the year still, I feel there's plenty of scope to set the bar considerably higher before midnight on New Year's eve, requiring the next Big Year lunatic to stretch even further."