

A world record big year for birds

By Nicholas Lund, Slate

I doubt anyone had a busier 2015 than Noah Strycker.

Beginning in Antarctica on New Year's Day 2015, the 29-year-old Oregon man crisscrossed 41 countries on all seven continents on his way to shattering the record for most bird species seen in a single year.* Of the estimated 10,400 bird species on Earth, Strycker saw 6,042 of them in just 365 days.

Big Years—birder slang for yearlong benders to see as many birds in a given area as possible—are a huge undertaking, even when focused on the birds in a given county or state. Hardcore birders with lots of spare time (and money) and a permissive spouse occasionally make a run at the American record, currently held by Neil Hayward, who saw 749 species in 2013.

But worldwide Big Year attempts are almost unheard of. Too grueling. Too expensive. Too many logistics. American ornithologist James Clements made the first real attempt at a global Big Year in 1989, finishing with 3,662 species. Two Brits, Alan Davies and Ruth Miller, took on Clements in 2008 and finished with 4,341 species while dodging armed robbers and abandoning sinking boats.

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