

North Country Notes

The Newsletter of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society
Marquette and Alger Counties, Michigan



December 2017

JOIN THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT!

Jeff Knoop

As recently as the late 19th century, many North Americans participated in the tradition of Christmas “side hunts” in which teams competed to kill the most birds regardless of size, number, or scarcity. In 1900, the U.S. ornithologist Frank Chapman, founder of *Bird-Lore* (which ultimately became *Audubon Magazine*), proposed that birds be counted instead of killed. In December of that year Chapman was able to garner the support of 27 observers in 25 places across the U.S. and CA. to partake in the first Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

Since then counts have been held every winter, with increasing numbers of observers. For instance, by the winter of 2012-13 nearly 72,000 observers from 2,369 locations and 17 countries were taking part in the annual count. The National Audubon Society now partners with Bird Studies of Canada and other organizations to formally organize and set rules for conducting this event.

Here are some Christmas Bird Count fun facts:

- The greatest number of species ever recorded by any U.S. location is 250 in the Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh count circle, Matagorda, Texas
- The greatest number of species in a count circle is 529 in Cosanga-Narupa, Ecuador, on the eastern slopes of the Andes
- In the 111th count, over *61 million* individual birds were reported, representing over *2400* species, one quarter of all bird species on Earth

Although the CBC’s are not necessarily a “scientific” study, they do provide good data on trends and overall health of birds on local, regional

and global scales. The resulting data on the winter ranges of birds are complementary to those of annual Breeding Bird Surveys.

Not many years after starting the CBC, Frank Chapman played a significant role in the passage of the most sweeping wildlife protection law in history (btw. U.S. and CA.): **The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918**. The federal law makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or sell birds listed therein as [migratory birds](#). The statute does not discriminate between live or dead birds and grants full protection to any bird parts including feathers, eggs, and nests. Over 800 species are currently on the list. Chapman was an important Board Member and later an employee during the early years of the National Audubon Society.

On the local level, the Marquette area count is celebrating its 70th year anniversary. In the 2016 count, there were 14 observers and 39 species identified. Since 1948 (first year of Marquette count) there have been 123 species identified including an ivory gull in 1995.

The 2017 Marquette CBC will take place on Saturday December 16th. The compiler is Melinda Stamp at mstamp@mstamp.net or 906-869-2489. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at Mattson Lower Harbor Park in Marquette. No advanced registration is necessary. The count circle covers a 7.5-mile radius centered on Old City Hall at 4th & Washington St. No prior birding experience is necessary but always welcome. Other CBC areas in the UP are listed near the end of this newsletter and include counts in Alger County, the Copper Country, Cedarville and other areas across the UP. You can also participate in a contemporaneous

feeder count and bird from the warmth of your home. If you are interested in a feeder count please contact Melinda Stamp for feeder forms and to pre-register.

On the day of the count, the team of observers is split into 3 or 4 groups each of whom cover specific pre-identified areas within the count circle. Roads are driven, short hikes are taken, Lake Superior

shoreline areas observed and other important bird habitat visited. Miles driven and walked as well as weather conditions are tallied and provided to the count circle compiler.

So, shake off those early winter blues and join in on one of the UP's CBC counts! It's fun, good exercise and you'll meet fellow birders and naturalists in the Marquette area.

Welcome to our 2 new LWAS Board Members Marlene Woo-Lun and Jeffrey Towner

We are excited to have you join us. You both bring special qualities that will enhance our group.

Marlene- I was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. After completing an undergraduate in microbiology at Ohio State University, I naturally changed directions by starting my own educational publishing company, Linworth Publishing, Inc. and then completed an MBA at OSU. For over 30 years, we published a nationally distributed professional magazine for school librarians, along with over 300 professional educational books for educators, and then sold the company in 2009. In Ohio, I was president of Columbus Audubon Society and on the board for Ohio Nature Conservancy. In Marquette, I just completed my term on the board of Marquette Symphony Orchestra and was president of the board last year.

Jeff- Jeff Towner is a new member of LWAS. He has a Bachelor's degree in Zoology from Ohio State University and a Master's degree in Wildlife Biology from Michigan State University. After carefully considering where in the country they wanted to retire to, he and his wife Diane moved from Bismarck, North Dakota to the Marquette area last June. Jeff retired as the field supervisor for the North Dakota field office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where he oversaw that agency's administration of several laws, including the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Prior to that, Jeff was field supervisor in West Virginia, and he worked for the Corps of Engineers environmental analysis and regulatory branches in Chicago, Detroit, and Alaska. Jeff was also a fisheries and national parks Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon and Niger, West Africa, respectively, and served as the anti-poaching officer for the World Wildlife Fund's mountain gorilla project in Rwanda, East Africa. Jeff has had a lifelong passion for protection and enjoyment of all wildlife and their habitats. He and Diane enjoy watching birds and experiencing the outdoors under their own power.

Birding the Peshekee Grade in November

Bruce Ventura

Six hearty souls participated in Laughing Whitefish Audubon's annual early winter trip to the Peshekee area north of Lake Michigan on November 11th. By the calendar, this time of year is Autumn, but by the weather, this is Winter. About six inches of snow lay on the ground, freshly

fallen, with more gently wafting down as we checked out the scenery and the birds.

Traveling in two vehicles, we stopped first in Diorite to check out the feeders that Vicky B. keeps filled. It was fairly quiet there, probably too late in the morning for the early feeding surge, and

too early for the “second breakfast” that winter birds seem to partake of. A few Blue Jays, Goldfinches, chickadees, and starlings were seen at Vicky’s feeders, and a lone Downy searched for tidbits in a nearby apple tree. The surprise sighting for this side trip occurred as we motored back south to US41, when a flock of about a dozen Wild Turkeys crossed the road in front of us.

We drove northward on the Peshekee Grade road about a half dozen miles, stopping several times to get out of the vehicles to walk along the road. A few Black-capped Chickadees and Common Redpolls were either heard or seen, but it was generally pretty quiet in terms of bird sounds. Light snow was falling, which may have muffled some of the more distant sounds that otherwise may have been detectable.

A walk down the south Arflin Lake road was next on the itinerary. Here we encountered one



of the highlights of the day. A lone Gray Jay found us, let us know it was in the area, and true to the nature of Gray Jays, came down to take a few bits of cracker. The bird was somewhat wary, first taking cracker crumbs from the ground with our group watching from a little distance. It eventually decided that we were not a threat, and it landed briefly on an outstretched hand to take a few more bites of cracker, much to our delight. Cameras clicked to capture the moment; however, a gray and black bird against dark evergreens and gray skies was not the perfect photo moment. Never-the-less, memorable moments for the group.

Further north up the grade road, we stopped at the McCormick Wilderness trailhead, and walked

a quarter mile east on the trail. Pretty quiet for the most part, a few BC Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches were heard. Gary P heard a turkey call, unusual for this area, but we were not able to locate it. The highlight for this little hike was observing a Black-backed Woodpecker for several minutes as it



worked through a spruce/balsam fir grove.

Photo by Skye Haas

Returning to the grade road, several large flocks of Common Redpolls were seen, whirling in the sky in clouds of randomly moving birds. Skye H estimated that the one flock was probably at least 150 birds.....quite a sight to behold as they were in constant motion between various birches and alders, gleaning seeds from the trees.

A local hunter stopped his truck next to us, to talk with us as we walked along the grade road, asking us if we’d seen the mountain lion chasing the three deer just down the road. We allowed that we had not, but said we would look for the tracks in the snow when we drove down there. I think we all knew that there wouldn’t be any mountain lion

tracks, but we had an entertaining conversation with the gentleman. (No tracks were found.)

We were able to find most of the “target” species for the area.....Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, redpolls, but missed one

that is sometimes seen or heard in this area, the Boreal Chickadee. The final sighting of the day was a mature Bald Eagle, perched high in a bare-limbed tree overlooking the Peshekee River just a mile north of US 41.

2017-2018 Christmas Bird Count Dates

The National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place annually from December 14 – January 5 and has been in existence for 118 years, making it the longest-running wildlife census in the country. Join with other birders to collect important information that is used to assess the health of the nation’s bird populations. For trends shown by CBC data, see the Audubon’s “State of the Birds” report at <http://birds.audubon.org/state-birds>.

ALL BIRDERS ARE WELCOME: Beginning birders will be paired with more experienced observers. This is a great way to learn more about the birds in your area. DRESS WARMLY!

Christmas Bird Counts in the local area:

- **December 16, 2017 (Saturday) - Marquette –**
The compiler is Melinda Stamp at mstamp@mstamp.net or 906-869-2489.
*Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at Mattson Lower Harbor Park in Marquette.
No advanced registration is necessary. Feeder forms are available by pre-registering with Melinda. The count circle covers a 7.5-mile radius centered on Old City Hall at 4th & Washington St.*
- **December 17, 2017 (Sunday) - AuTrain**
The compiler is Scott Hickman at suboscine@gmail.com or 906-892-8603.
Please use the email address for communication since count information is distributed by email. Please let Scott know at least 4 days in advance if you want to participate so that count circle coverage can be properly coordinated and communicated to all participants.
- **December 20, 2017 (Wednesday) – Cedarville and Les Cheneaux**
The compiler is Elliot Nelson.
For information, contact Elliot at elliottkarlnelson@gmail.com or at elliottne@msu.edu
- **January 2, 2018 (Tuesday) - Gwinn**
The compiler is Brian Johnson at baidaj@yahoo.com or 231-557-4011. Contact Brian for meeting place and time.
- **TBD – Michigamme Highlands - Peshekee Grade**
The compiler is Gary Palmer at jgpalmer@gmail.com. Contact Gary for more information.

U.P. Birdnet

For those of you that are not familiar with the U.P. Birdnet, it is a convenient way to keep up with bird activity and sightings (rare and not so rare) in the U.P. It's also a forum to ask questions and share information pertaining to birds. Anyone with an email address can join by sending an email message to birdnet-subscribe@upbirders.org -- that's all you have to do. The subject line and message body can be empty. You must send the subscribe message from the email account you wish to subscribe. You can subscribe yourself, but if you need assistance the list owner, Melinda Stamp, can help. She can be contacted by email at mstamp@mstamp.net Once you've joined the birdnet, you will receive emails from anyone who sends a message via the birdnet. If you send an email using the birdnet address, it will reach everyone else on the list.

This list-serve isn't just for bird experts. It's for bird enthusiasts of all skill levels. There are however some important guidelines to follow in using the birdnet. They can be found at this website: <http://www.upbirders.org/maillist.html> "See" you on the Birdnet!

Upcoming Laughing Whitefish Audubon Programs

Laughing Whitefish Audubon meetings and programs are held in the Community Room of Peter White Public Library in Marquette at 7:00 p.m. We usually meet on the second Wednesday of the month, although the date may occasionally vary due to scheduling conflicts with the library. For information, contact Ann Joyal at ajoyal@nmu.edu or at 226-6749.

- **January 10, 2018 (Wednesday)** *"Photos from Thirty-three Years of Life in the Back Country"*
PRESENTER: Thom Skelding
This program is a photo essay featuring Thom's excellent photographs of the landscapes, animals and birds that he has encountered in the woods near his home during the last 33 years – scenes that may be familiar to many in the audience.
- **February 6, 2018 (TUESDAY)** *"Winter Adventures in the Southwest"*
PRESENTER: Gary Palmer
Last winter Gary Palmer joined Skye Haas and Louie Dombroski for a rambling five-week road trip birding their way through California, Arizona, and Texas. Beginning with a stunning drive down the renowned California Highway 1 in search of California Condor, winding through the alien landscape of Joshua Tree National Park on the way to the Elegant Trogons and more of Arizona's sky islands, wrapping up with Green Jays and a rare Rose-throated Becard in Texas' lower Rio Grande Valley, this program will recount the incredible birding and breathtaking vistas of their dash through the Southwest.
- **March 13, 2018 (TUESDAY)** *"Demystifying Sparrow ID"*
PRESENTER: Nate Martineau
This presentation on sparrow identification is aimed at helping people prepare for the sparrow migration that starts in April. Hopefully it will help people to realize that the challenge of sparrow ID isn't as daunting or insurmountable as it may seem at first.
- **April 11, 2018 (Wednesday)**, *"The JP Chickadee Project: Big Data from Little Local Birds."*
PRESENTER: Dr. Alec Lindsay, NMU Biology Department
Alec and his troupe of undergraduate and graduate students have been working on a new project in the Marquette area. They have been placing color bands on chickadees (and nuthatches), including bands with small RFID chips. In this talk he and some of his students will tell us about what they are finding with their work, what other questions they might try to answer, and how students and the community can get involved.

Tentative program for Fall 2018

- **September 12, 2018 (Wednesday)** – Zach Gayk – Keweenaw warbler research

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form

Dues support the newsletter, programs, & local birding activities. Donations are tax-deductible.

Your name (or gift-recipient's name): _____

Street: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address _____

(E-mail addresses are not given to other groups or commercial entities)

Annual Membership fees (please check one)

Gift membership - \$15 Regular membership - \$15 OR Student - \$5.00

How would you like to receive your newsletter? (check one) e-mail or postal service

Additional donations:

\$ _____ General Expenses for club projects

\$ _____ Research/Conservation Grant to fund birding research/conservation in the UP

FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS please supply your name and the recipient will be notified of your gift: DONOR NAME: _____

Mail this form, along with your check (payable to LWAS) to:

Ann Joyal, 346 W. Crescent St. Marquette, MI 49855 (ajoyal@nmu.edu or 906-226-6749)

c/o Beth Olson
5 Arrowhead Dr.
Marquette, MI 49855

