

North Country Notes

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



December 2015

New Chocoley Bayou Nature Preserve in the works

by Bruce Ventura

A fourteen plus acre tract in the Village of Harvey is a step closer to becoming a nature preserve, thanks to the continuing work of a number of conservation-minded individuals. A purchase agreement has been signed with the current landowner. Fund-raising activities and campaigns are in the planning stages.

The tract is a combination of three parcels located on the east side of the Chocoley Bayou, an arm of the Chocoley River near where the river empties into Lake Superior. The tract is bounded on its north side by the Iron Ore Heritage Trail/North Country Trail, on the east by a short road known as Hotel Place, on the south by Harvey's Main Street, and on the west by the bayou, in a long S-shaped curve. The land has a "dune and swale" topography, with mature forest of Northern Red Oak, White Pine, birches, and aspen on the low dunes and a mix of Northern White Cedar, Eastern Tamarack, and alder in the lower, wetter swales.

The area supports much wildlife, despite being surrounded by suburban development. Christmas Bird Counts, migration counts, and birders doing their own observations have documented much bird activity in the woodlands and on the waterway. While the area is not (yet) officially designated an IBA (important bird area), it is well known among local birders as a place to observe multiple species of waterfowl during migrations and warblers and other songbirds during migration and breeding seasons. The purchase and development of trails is being done by a

consortium of individuals representing multiple organizations. The Upper Peninsula Land

Conservancy's Executive Director, Chris Burnett and Assistant Director, Andrea Denham are coordinating all of the efforts on the project. Assistance with the landowner negotiations was provided by The Nature Conservancy's Jeff Knoop. Jerry Maynard, raptor rehabilitator at the nearby Chocoley Raptor Center, and Scott Emerson, local landowner, have provided much energy and guidance for the project. UPLC will become the landowner once sufficient funds are secured. Chocoley Township has committed to assisting with maintenance, such as trash removal once the site is open to the public. Approximately twenty area organizations have pledged support for the project.

The current plan for the site is to develop a trail system for passive recreation, including birding, hiking, fishing, and quiet contemplation of nature. Much of the tract will remain undeveloped, providing undisturbed habitat for the flora and fauna that live there. A small dock is contemplated to allow small boats to access the site (there is evidence that boaters already land at several places on the shore; a dock should reduce the impact on the land by reducing erosion caused by boaters landing on the shore). A small parking lot will be developed at the southeast corner of the tract, near the Bayou Restaurant, to allow parking for those people who travel to the site by automobile. Interpretative signage will be developed to help educate users of the Preserve about the natural features of the site, as well as about the rich history of the immediate area.

This project is a grass-roots, community driven activity. It is supported by the township, but is not a governmental acquisition funded by local tax dollars. Therefore, funding must come from

voluntary donations from the public, people like you. The purchase agreement calls for closing on the sale by May 2016; thus, time for fund-raising is limited. Your support will be greatly appreciated. The Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy is acting as the monetary organization; donations can be made to UPLC, with a note specifying that the donation is made to the Chocolay Bayou project. These donations

will be kept entirely separate from other donations made to UPLC. Note that because UPLC is a 501c3 organization, your donation to the Bayou project may be considered a charitable donation for income tax purposes. Donations can be made on-line at the UPLC website (www.uplandconservancy.org) or by sending a check to UPLC at 2208 US 41S, Marquette, MI 49855.

New Members Added to the Executive Board

by Ann Joyal

The annual membership meeting of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon club was held on November 11, with an informal program where members snacked on light refreshments and shared original photos of birds or other nature-oriented subjects. The only business this year was the approval of three additions to the Executive Board. The new board-members bring a wide variety of skills, contacts, and birding knowledge to the Board, and their interest and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated.

- Alec Olivier: Alec is a freshman at Marquette Sr. High School and has been seriously birding for about 4 years, although he has been watching feeder birds and going to Whitefish Point for his entire life. Alec maintains his own website at 21stcenturybirder.com, which offers a fantastic photo gallery, advice on gear and backyard bird-feeding, a blog, and other birding information.
- Amanda O'Neill: Originally from St. Ignace, Amanda now works and lives in Marquette. She is an active traveler who loves to see new places and photograph birds. Prior to her current employment with an adventure travel company, Amanda held a variety of outdoor-orientated positions from tour guide to Park Ranger.
- Nate Martineau: Nate is a freshman at NMU with a strong interest in birding. He was one of the founding members of Michigan Young Birders in Lower Michigan, and has taken an active interest in the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society. He is an enthusiastic birder, already spotting some significant finds of his own in our area.

The Laughing Whitefish Audubon Executive Board now consists of ten members: Skye Haas (president), Jeff Knoop (vice-president), Ann Joyal (secretary/treasurer), Beth Olson (newsletter), Jude Holloway, Nate Martineau, Amanda O'Neill, Alec Olivier, Gary Palmer, and Bruce Ventura.

Gift Memberships are Available for Laughing Whitefish Audubon

by Ann Joyal

Looking for the perfect gift for one of your birding friends this holiday season? Consider giving the gift of membership to the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society. Along with invitations to interesting programs and local birding activities, the recipient will receive a one-year subscription to our quarterly newsletter. It's the perfect way to introduce a friend or relative to the local birding community. To give a gift subscription, please mark the "Gift Membership" box and include the recipient's name and contact information on the membership form. Remember to supply your name in the designated box so we can notify the recipient of your gift.

They really are “GREAT” Horned Owls..... By Alec Olivier

My dad and I were looking for shorebirds at the Gentz’s Golf Course in Beaver Grove when we got a phone call from Scot Stewart. He called to tell us there was an Adult Great Horned Owl at a house on rock St. in Marquette. We immediately headed for Marquette. On our way to Marquette we stopped at our house to pick up one of my brothers.

Once we found the house it was very easy to find the large owl perched in a tree in their backyard. The homeowners came out and I set up my spotting scope. We all got great looks. We watched it for around an hour and then went home. Lucky for me, my mom wanted to see it, too, so I was able to go back and watch it.



Photos by Alec Olivier

We watched it for about 30 min when I looked at my mom and she looked at me. Did the owl just vocalize? Yes! It kept calling for another 15 min when it decided to take off and fly toward St. Peter’s Church! It was getting dark now and hard to see. We ran over to the Church where it flew out of a poorly lit spot and we couldn’t see what it was doing in the dim light.

From the church it flew towards the bypass and landed on a telephone pole above the highway. My mom and brother went to get our car while I watched it. We drove over to the telephone pole and it flew to another telephone pole across the highway. When we got to the telephone pole across the highway the owl was still there. It stayed there for a few minutes before it flew towards Hurley field. We weren’t able to locate it again that night.

Two days later, my dad, my brother and I went to go look around the church for a nest. We parked the car started looking for any sign of owls. On the stairway leading into a side door of the church my dad found an owl pellet. We were close. My dad went inside the church and my brother and I walked across the street to get a better view of the church. I pointed my binoculars toward a possible nesting spot. There were two adult Great Horned Owls!

Not only was I lucky enough to find a Great Horned Owl nest but I was also on spring break! That means I could stay up later and watch them in the dark. This was second year in a row when spring break has been the same time as a good bird (Slaty-Backed Gull in 2014).



Photos by Alec Olivier

I saw a lot of cool stuff while watching the owls. I

I got to see them interact with one another and hear them vocalize a lot. The male had a very noticeable pattern. It would "hoot" on the church, a tree across from the church, the trees at the house where I first saw the owl and the courthouse. It never went farther north than the courthouse. I believe it was doing a lot of hunting in the woods by the bypass. I think another pair of owls occupy the Park Cemetery and Harlow park.

It was 22 days later on April 26th when we first saw owlets. There were a total of two.

Unfortunately, the male owl was shot with a BB gun. It was rescued by a local raptor rehab center.

The owlets fledged and were last seen on May 27th.



Photos by Alec Olivier



Photos by Alec Olivier

On August 31st, there was a group of crows mobbing some kind of raptor in the woods north of the church. We were not able to find what kind of raptor it was but I like to think it was one of the owls. The time spent with these owls was a highlight of 2015 and my birding career.

Participate in America's Oldest Wildlife Census - the Christmas Bird Count!

The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place annually from December 14 – January 5 and is the longest-running wildlife census in the country. Join other birders on a local Christmas Bird Count, collecting important information that is used to assess the health of the nation's bird populations. Discover some of the prime birding spots in your area. You may join in as many Bird Counts as you would like; there is no charge to participate.

Each count takes place in an established 15-mile diameter circle, and is organized by a count-compiler. Volunteers follow specified routes, tallying all birds they see or hear during the day. If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you may be able to make arrangements with the compiler to report the birds that visit your feeder on count day.

Beginning birders are welcome and 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 17, 2015 (Thursday)** - Whitefish Point CBC, and we could use a few more folks out on the roads/woods. Compiler is Charlie Weaver. Contact him for further information: 989- 348-3299

- **December 18, 2015 (Friday) - Cedarville, Mackinac Co. (Les Cheneaux Area)** The compiler is Tina Hall at chall@tnc.org or phone: (days) 906-225-0399 ext.4012, (evenings) 906-225-0139.
Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Ang-Gio's Restaurant in Cedarville.
- **December 19, 2015 (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. 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. No advanced registration is necessary.
- **December 20, 2015 (Sunday) - AuTrain** – The compiler is Scott Hickman at suboscine@hotmail.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 would like to participate so that count circle coverage can be properly coordinated and then communicated to all participants.
- **January 3, 2016 (Saturday) - Gwinn** – The compiler is Brian Johnson at baidaj@yahoo.com or 231-557-4011. *Contact Brian for instructions.*
- **Tentatively January 3, 2016 (Saturday) - Peshekee Grade CBC.** This date is tentative. If you are interested, email Gary Palmer at palmerjg@gmail.com.

These are the only CBC's that we currently have information for.

For a report on last year's results, visit www.stateofthebirds.org
This webpage provides access to the full printed report from 2014, as well as a "watch list" and a list of "common bird species in steep decline."

Evening Programs January-April 2016

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Library, beginning at 7:00 p.m. and ending around 8:30. They are usually held on the second Wednesday of the month, unless there is a scheduling conflict. For information call 226-6749.

December: NO MEETING consider participating in a Christmas Bird Count

January 13, 2016: "*Dinosaurs Among Us!*"

Presenter: Alec Lindsay, Biology Department, NMU

Find out what really happened to the dinosaurs. The presentation will be about 50 minutes long, with plenty of time for questions, answers and discussion.

February 10, 2016 – "*50 Hikes In Michigan's Upper Peninsula*"

Presenter: Thomas Funke

Follow along as Tom hikes the trails of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. His pictures and commentary will reveal some of his discoveries along the way. There is a companion book of the same title that will be available for purchase and signing at the presentation.

March 9, 2016 - TBD

April 13, 2016 - "*Midwest Bird Monitoring*"

Presenter: Katie Koch, Midwest Bird Monitoring Coordinator, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Katie Koch will discuss the 100-year anniversary of the first international Migratory Bird Treaty (and our neat UP connection to that), the great legacy of bird conservation since then, and setting the stage for the next century of bird conservation. To learn more about the Centennial and planning underway, visit this website:

<http://www.fws.gov/birds/MBTreaty100/>.

NO EVENING PROGRAMS FROM MAY – AUGUST

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 Olsson
5 Arrowhead Dr.
Marquette, MI 49855

