



North Country Notes

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

March 2012

Greetings from the chair,

Last month, we received some very good news from Joe Kaplan of the Whitefish Point Joint Committee: A proposal to further expand the shipwreck museum at the point, which is owned by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, had been withdrawn. This proposal had been in the works for over 25 years, and it involved the construction of two museum wing additions, two parking lots, and a service drive. Bird habitat at the point, which had already been reduced by expansion of the museum, was in danger of being even further diminished.

In 2009, the executive committee of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society composed three letters expressing our concern about this issue. Two of these letters were sent to both Senator Levin and Senator Stabenow. Another letter was sent to the Marquette Mining Journal, to increase public awareness of what might happen at Whitefish Point. Did these letters have any effect on the outcome? There's no way to be sure, and certainly LWAS was only one voice among many on this issue, but we are glad that we played a part, however small, in protecting bird habitat at Whitefish Point.

Just as we received the good news about Whitefish Point, we were engaged in another letter-writing effort. We had been informed of a proposal to build a cell phone tower on Brockway Mountain, near the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula. While we support the efforts of the citizens of Copper Harbor and the surrounding area to obtain cell phone coverage, we believe that other sites should be considered. A tower on Brockway Mountain would pose a threat to migrating birds as well as harming the aesthetic appeal of the most prominent ridge in the area.

Initially we sent a letter to the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners, with copies sent to the Keweenaw County Zoning Board of Appeals and the Keweenaw County Park Commissioners. The Copper Country Audubon Club had already sent a similar letter. Our letter included two attachments: an article in Birdwatching magazine highlighting the raptor migration at Brockway Mountain and an article from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about bird kill rates at towers and how they can be minimized. We recommended some possible alternatives to building a tower on Brockway. These included an extension of the existing towers at the Keweenaw Mountain Lodge, use of the existing State Police tower at East Bluff, or a new site off Brockway Mountain.

Meanwhile, several other organizations also expressed concern about the proposed tower, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Michigan Nature Association, and the Hawk Migration Association of North America. Also, a petition, which some of you may have signed, has been circulated by the Friends of Brockway, expressing opposition to the tower. Since then, LWAS has sent another letter to Senators Levin and Stabenow as well as the Federal Communications Commission. The latest news is positive: It appears that if plans to build the tower are to proceed, an environmental assessment will need to be completed, due to Brockway's significance to migrating birds. We will keep you up-to-date on any further developments.

The cell phone tower issue perfectly demonstrates one of the reasons that the Keweenaw Raptor Survey was initiated. In our letters, we were able to cite the numbers of raptors that were counted during the spring migration at Brockway Mountain the past two years. It was also helpful that our hawk

counter, Arthur Green, took it upon himself not only to count hawks, but also to count humans. In addition to counting 14,000 hawks, Arthur logged a total of 2,765 visitors to the mountain top last spring, many of whom had a great deal of interest in the hawk migration, not to mention their interest in the relatively unspoiled views from the ridge. That's a lot of visitors and a significant economic impact at a time of year that precedes the peak tourist season in the Keweenaw.

Again, I would like to thank all of you who donated to the Keweenaw Raptor Survey, helping to keep the project fully funded for all three years. It's been a productive collaboration between LWAS and Copper Country Audubon, with additional support from the Michigan Audubon Society. We are looking forward to

the third and final year of the project. The beginning of the count season (March 15th) is fast approaching. Let's hope that in the coming years the birds can fly low over the ridge, as they always have, without encountering man-made obstructions. If we can play a role in helping to protect bird habitat at Brockway, as we did at Whitefish Point, our little group can be very proud of itself.

Greg Cleary--

From a Class to a Life-style: The Birth of the Northern Parula's Birding Club

Its nearing two years since the Northern Parulas have officially become a club. Known to members and the community as the "NOPAS", the young club has more active members than ever. The members of NOPAS have more than the birds to thank for their success. Dr. Alec Lindsay's field ornithology class introduced a lot of us to a foreign world that was right in front of our eyes. The first class trip to White Fish point yielded over a hundred bird species. To say that the first day was overwhelming would be an understatement.

By the end of the class, birding had become an obsession that we couldn't simply part with (not that we'd want to). Under the advisement of Dr. Lindsay the birding club was born. Birds had forged a bond between us that we didn't want to break. As a club, our objective is to promote the conservation and education of local birds and their habitats.

The club is looking forward to their first-ever trip to Texas. The spring-migration trip has been in the making for over a year now and is approaching fast. With the expertise of Skye Haas the club will be visiting prime migration

hot-spots such as Benson State Park, Sable Palms Sanctuary, and Aransas Wildlife Refuge.

In addition to the upcoming Texas trip the NOPAS are preparing to attend the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative conference in March. Several members will be participating in the poster session and NOPA president Gary Palmer will be presenting his research "Radar Ornithology and Wind Energy in the Great Lakes".

In addition to their own activities, the NOPAS have joined the Laughing Whitefish Audubon in events such as Christmas bird counts, PP picnics, and Peshekee trips. The NOPAS birding club is open to the public as well as students. Monthly meetings usually occur the week after LWAS meetings on the campus of NMU. In addition to the monthly meetings the club has started a new tradition of journal article discussions. This month the club is meeting to discuss John Probst et al's "Population increase in Kirtland's warbler and summer range expansion to Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula, USA".

The NOPAS use email and Facebook to coordinate events, meetings and day trips. If you would like to join the NOPA email list or

Facebook page please email Laurel at Lahill@nmu.edu.



Northern Parula group in the field
photo by Skye Haas

The Keweenaw Raptor Net

By Joseph Youngman

Many LWAS members are probably aware of the major spring raptor migration that comes up the Keweenaw Peninsula every spring. Brockway Mountain (the site of the Keweenaw Raptor Survey count) is the best known place to witness this movement of many thousands of raptors. But there are still a couple mysteries in the Keweenaw raptor migration. One - at Brockway Mountain over 75% of the birds are seen going eastward toward the tip of the Keweenaw and much fewer are seen coming west past Brockway. Two - the Manitou Island Bird Survey (2002 - 2009) has pretty clearly shown that raptors do not cross Lake Superior from Manitou and they seem to return to the Keweenaw.

So, where do those missing raptors go? It seems quite likely that they move westward out of the Keweenaw either along the south

shore of the peninsula or perhaps along the center. Both of those pathways are beyond the view of the Brockway observer.

This spring a “Keweenaw Raptor Net” is planned for 7 days at the end of April and the beginning of May. During that period observers will be in place at three places in addition to the main K.R.S. counter at Brockway. Observers will be placed at Rocky Ridge and the Bete Grise beach and together with the Brockway observer, they will form a line or net across the Keweenaw from north to south. Hopefully our observers will visually “catch” all the raptors moving through the tip of the Keweenaw on those days. They will record the numbers, species and flight direction for all raptors they see and the resulting data will greatly improve the knowledge of raptor movement through the Keweenaw.

Oh, I said three other sites didn't I? The last site will be the west tip of Manitou Island where Greg Cleary and myself will spend 6 days each. Our observations there will add a critical piece of the puzzle - how many raptors are coming from or going to Manitou on any given day. The main count at Brockway has for years

provided a look at the numbers, the magnitude, of the Keweenaw raptor flight. By comparing the species counts and flight directions seen at the various sites, this spring's Raptor Net will give a more comprehensive picture of the complex movement of raptors through the tip of the Keweenaw.



Partial Albino Red-tailed Hawk at Brockway Mountain
photo by Skye Haas

LWAS Meeting Dates and Programs

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Programs begin at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room of Peter White Public Library. Meetings usually take place on the second Wednesday of the month. However, due to scheduling conflicts at the library, we must schedule May's meeting on the first Wednesday of the month.

March 14: ***Planting a Future for Birds – the Escanaba Migratory Bird Enhancement Initiative*** presented by Joe Kaplan, Director of Common Coast Research & Conservation.

Joe Kaplan will present details of a new community-supported initiative in Escanaba to enhance, restore, and create habitat in city parks for the benefit of migratory birds. He will explore the dynamics of bird migration and the importance of “stop-over” habitat and native species in supporting a diversity of birds.

April 11: ***Whitefish Point Bird Observatory*** presented by Tony Janisch, Director of WPBO

May 2: * (FIRST WEDNESDAY): ***Birding Identification Program***

Greg Cleary will present a program to “re-train” our eyes and ears for the Spring migration.

2012 Field Trips and Outings

Monthly Presque Isle Bird Walk (May through October) Greg Cleary

Sunday, May 13 and then every 2nd Saturday of the month from June – October

This is a good walk for beginners, but everyone can learn and contribute as we enjoy one of the best birding spots in the area. We always meet at 8:00 AM at the Presque Isle Bog Walk parking lot and we walk through the bog, along the shoreline, and into the woods on Presque Isle itself. The walk usually ends around 10:00 or 10:30.

Sat. May 5th Brockway Mountain

Join us for our sixth trip to Brockway Mountain for a day of hawk watching in one of the Midwest's premier locations for raptor migration. This will be the third year we will have a hired hawk counter on Brockway as part of the Keweenaw Raptor Survey. During the past two years of the project, the season high count has occurred in the first week of May, with 2507 raptors recorded on May 5, 2011. Last year 17 species of raptors were recorded, including a Black Vulture that was new for the count, 4 Swainson's Hawks, and 9346 Broad-winged Hawks. (www.Keweenawraptorsurvey.org)

This is an all day trip and we will be leaving Marquette at 6:00 AM, from our usual car-pooling spot at the corner of Fourth and Spring Streets. Please be sure to bring plenty of gas money if you think you may be riding with others. Make sure to bring lunch, water, snacks, warm clothes, folding chairs, scopes, cameras, and anything else you might want. There are outhouses on top of the mountain. For those who live closer to Brockway and would like to join us, we should be arriving on Brockway around 9:00 to 9:30 AM. If you have any questions about this trip, contact Beth Olson at tolson@chartermi.net.

Saturday, May 12th Migration Count

or at 228-8781

Contact Greg Cleary for information. g.cleary@sbcglobal.net

Saturday May 19th Peninsula Point- Spring Migration & Birders Picnic!

Information contact Skye Haas (theowlranch@gmail.com)

Peninsula Point Lighthouse at the tip of the Stonington Peninsula is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration in all its feathered glory! This field trip will be an all-day affair, though we strongly suggest arriving at dawn or shortly after as migrants fly off Green Bay. We are still in the beginning stages of planning, but there will be a mid-day cookout in the picnic area - a chance to meet and mingle with other birders.

Hundreds of neotropical songbirds like warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and thrushes are found each year along with shorter-distance migrants like sparrows, jays, woodpeckers, chickadees and finches. Some days the marshy beach can be covered in shorebirds, with uncommon migrants like Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot and Piping Plover seen annually. Participants at last year's outing tallied a total of 118 different species. *See our newsletter from December 2011 for a description of this field trip.*

Saturday, September 8 Delta County Field Trip

Saturday, November 10 Peshekee Grade Field Trip (North of Michigamme)

View boreal species such as Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee.

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2012

Your dues support local birding activities, bird feeding, and program costs

Name (or names) _____

Address _____

City, State and Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

(E-mail addresses are used to provide you with updates and newsletters; your address is not given to other groups or commercial entities)

Membership fees (please check one)

_____ Regular (Individual and Family) Annual - \$15.00

_____ Student - \$5.00

_____ Additional donation to support bird feeding at the Audubon supported feeding station at MooseWood Nature Center on Presque Isle \$ _____

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

Ann Joyal

346 W. Crescent St.

Marquette, MI 49855

Phone 226-6749

For you who are already members, check your mailing label on this newsletter to see when you last paid your membership dues. Dues are paid for a one year period.

If you are currently "paid – up", consider giving this membership form to someone you know who might be interested in joining Laughing Whitefish Audubon.



c/o Beth Olson

5 Arrowhead Dr.

Marquette, MI 49855