

North Country Notes



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

March 2015

Greetings!

I hope everyone has made it through another U.P. winter successfully. Like last winter, it was bitter cold, but at least many of us had finches at our feeders - feisty flocks of redpolls, siskins and goldfinches to keep us entertained. One of my favorite ways to spend a winter's morning is sipping from a cup of coffee with finches scrapping for seed right on the other side of my window.

Finches weren't the only special visitors we had from the north this year. Snowy Owls once again irrupted southward from the tundra. It's been occurring so often the last few winters, it's almost hard to remember that this is a rare treat rather than what to expect! That being said, they were here, so why not make the most of it? I led a Michigan Audubon winter birding tour back in January in the Soo, and we were able to tally in at least 44 Snowy Owls for the weekend. It was pretty exciting and at one point we had at least six in view from one spot!

Also taking advantage of this owl invasion is Project Snowstorm. A collaborative research effort, the project tracks the movements of Snowy Owls in the Northeast and Great Lakes by placing GPS transmitters on the birds. Project Snowstorm started in the winter of 2013-14, and the 2014-15 season was off to a bang in November, when birds captured in the first season began to pop back up on the radar as they headed south yet again. The project was expanded this year and Michigan Audubon made a call for donations to purchase a couple

transmitters to place on owls here in Michigan. In January the LWAS board met and decided to contribute \$300 dollars to the project.

The plan was to place a transmitter on an owl downstate and one in the eastern UP; the latter bird to be captured by Whitefish Point Bird Observatory owl banders Chris Neri and Nova MacKentley. Donation goals were quickly met, and money was raised to purchase three transmitters! A fourth transmitter was gifted by Project Snowstorm and two owls on both peninsulas were radio-tagged. Here in the UP, Chris and Nova caught two owls in adjacent territories near Pickford in eastern Chippewa County, and got them outfitted with transmitters. Both birds were given names to use for tracking; the first bird was called Chippewa and the second Whitefish Point. Very cool to have a bird named after a renowned UP birding hotspot!

Now here is what is exciting about the technology: you can see the maps these owls are generating for yourself! Go to the website <http://www.projectsnowstorm.org/>. In the menu bar, select the tab for the maps, then the 2014-15 season. Look for the two named UP owls and click on them. The map has interactive features that you can use to follow the owl's movement.

You will notice that Laughing Whitefish Audubon is credited as a sponsor for these owls, and I must thank you, our membership, for once again helping to support bird research in the Upper Peninsula. LWAS has been an excellent supporter of bird research, donating to

Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Peninsula Point Bird Survey, Keweenaw Raptor Survey and to investigators like NMU graduate student Laurel Hill. Laurel gave an excellent presentation on her research at the most recent LWAS program. She is studying Spruce Grouse on the Yellow Dog Plains and was partly

supported by our UP Avian Research Grant - a project that is membership and donor funded. So again, thank you and please continue to help us explore and understand our dynamic home for birds.

Skye Haas



Michigan Audubon Executive Director Jonathan Lutz

Comparing Christmas Bird Counts in the LWAS Region

By Ann Joyal

As the Christmas Bird Counts wrapped up this year, a member asked me if there was any difference between birds found in our local count-areas. I had no idea, but the question piqued my curiosity.

Members of LWAS coordinated 5 different counts this season, beginning with AuTrain on December 14 and ending 20 days later with Gwinn on January 3. The counts varied in the number of people who participated, the party-hours per count, accessibility to observation sites, and the type of habitat covered within sites. All of these factors make it very hard to compare data from different sites.

Marquette (MQ):	2781 birds	44 species	46.25 party hours
Gwinn (GW):	1002 birds	28 species	15.50 party hours
Cedarville/Les Cheneaux (LE)	983 birds	31 species	8.00 party hours
Michigamme Highlands (MH)	977 birds	25 species	
AuTrain (AU)	859 birds	36 species	30.00 party hours
TOTALS	6602 birds	63 species	

What were the most numerous birds in each count-area?

Each count-area had several species with large numbers of birds, and it took surprisingly few species to compose almost 50 percent of an area's total count:

Species with the Highest Bird-counts in Each Area:

Marquette (52%): Mallard (854), Black-capped Chickadee (323), Rock Pigeon (263)

Gwinn (55%): Black-capped Chickadee (232), Rock Pigeon (205), Blue Jay (111)

Les Cheneaux (58%): European Starling (342), Black-capped Chickadee (224)

Michigamme (48%): Pine Siskins (466)

AuTrain (50%): Black-capped Chickadee (245), Am. Crow (74), Pine Siskin(63), Red-breasted Nuthatch(50)

Which species were present in all 5 count-areas?

Statements about species-representation should be qualified by pointing out that a Count tallies the birds that were seen on one particular day. Different or additional species might be seen on another day or in another week. However, the five count-areas had some similarities in types of species – especially species with large numbers of birds. But only 14 of the 63 species were found in every count area.

Species found in All Five Count-Areas

Species	Total # in all count- areas	Highest # in any count-area	High Area(s)	Lowest # in any count-area	Low Area(s)
Ruffed Grouse	20	8	GW	2	LE, MH
Bald Eagle	19	6	LE	1	MH
Mourning Dove	228	118	MQ	3	MH
Downy Woodpecker	112	56	MQ	9	MH
Hairy Woodpecker	60	23	MQ	4	LE, MH
Pileated Woodpecker	33	18	MQ	1	MH
Blue Jay	474	229	MQ	33	AU
American Crow	338	168	MQ	9	MH
Common Raven	115	48	LE	5	MQ
Black-capped Chickadee	1162	323	MQ	138	MH
Red-breasted Nuthatch	183	50	GW,AU	15	LE
White-breasted Nuthatch	73	26	GW	1	MH
European Starling	495	342	LE	1	MH
American Goldfinch	225	178	MQ	3	MH

*AU=AuTrain, GW=Gwinn, LE=Les Cheneaux, MH=Michigamme Highlands, MQ=Marquette

Which Species Were Found in Only One Count-Area?

Twenty-five of the sixty-three Christmas Bird Count species (or 40%) were unique to only one count area, and all species were represented by very few birds. In fact, only 99 total birds are listed in the table for unique species, constituting only 1.5% of the 6602 birds counted. Although small in number, sighting one of these “gems” is the highlight of the count for many birders.

Species of Birds Unique to a Single Count-Area

AuTrain (4)	1 Trumpeter Swan, 1 Hooded Merganser, 1 Spruce Grouse, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Les Cheneaux (3)	28 Sharp-tailed Grouse, 2 Rough-legged Hawks, 8 Snowy Owls
Michigamme (3)	2 Black-backed Woodpecker , 2 Gray Jays, 1 Boreal Chickadee
Marquette (15)	1 Wood Duck, 2 Greater Scaup, 2 Long-tailed Ducks, 6 Buffleheads, 22 Common Mergansers, 3 Red-Breasted Mergansers, 1 Cooper Hawk, 1 Thayer’s Gull , 4 Glaucous Gulls, 1 Great Black-backed Gull, 1 Great Horned Owl, 1 Belted Kingfisher, 2 American Robins, 1 White-crowned Sparrow, 5 House Finches
Gwinn (0)	No unique species were found in Gwinn

What Did the Compilers Have to Say?

There is a field in the database that compilers may use to note unusual species, low-count birds, and high-count birds. This allows consistent comments between CBC reports. Listed below are any comments noted by the compilers in our five counts:

AuTrain: Three unusual species: 1 Spruce Grouse, 1 Northern Cardinal, and 2 Common Grackles.

One low-count species: 5 Wild Turkeys

One high-count species: 9 Pileated Woodpeckers

Gwinn: One low-count species: 8 Common Ravens

Two High-count species: 111 Blue Jays, 10 Brown Creepers

Marquette: Two Unusual species: 1 Wood Duck, Northern Pintail (count-week)

More Information about Counts

A much more entertaining discussion of some of the local bird counts can be viewed on the Laughing Whitefish Audubon web page at <http://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/> where compilers of the Gwinn, Michigamme, and Marquette counts have posted their results, observations, and comparisons with past counts.

Results from this year’s national counts are posted in a very complete manner at the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count site at <http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/>. To view the results, select “Current Year” at the top of the page. This will take you to a site where you can enter your state and then view all of the different counts that have been posted. The National Audubon site is the source of most of the data that I compiled for this report.

LWAS Awards Second Upper Peninsula Avian Research Grant

In 2013, LWAS began fund-raising for a club-sponsored \$500 research grant for birding research in the Upper Peninsula. In 2014 the grant was awarded to Laurel Hill to help finance her Master’s thesis on “Changes in Population and Habitat of Spruce Grouse on the Yellow Dog Plains.”

We are pleased to announce that this year’s U.P. Avian Research Grant has been awarded to Gary Palmer to help fund the third year of the “Peninsula Point Bird Survey.” Located at the tip of the

Stonington Peninsula on Lake Michigan, Peninsula Point is well-known for the number and diversity of birds seen during spring migration. Its importance is recognized by the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program, and among the taxa monitored are a number of species of conservation concern (BCC, US Department of the Interior 2008). For the first time, evening-surveys will be conducted in order to better document the numbers of ducks and shorebirds migrating past the point. Data collected during the project will be submitted to the Midwest Avian Data Center for use by a wide variety of government agencies as well as the public. We are proud to help support this research.

Chocolay Raptor Center Offers Tour

The Chocolay Raptor Center will give two educational tours on Saturday, June 13, and Sunday, June 14, from 4:00-5:30 p.m. These tours are open to LWAS members and friends, as well as the general public. Free-will donations will be collected on site to help support the rescue, rehabilitation and educational efforts of the center. Since space is limited, pre-registration is requested by calling 226-6749. Upon pre-registering, you will receive directions to the center, and your place will be reserved on the day you request. The presentation is appropriate for all ages.

The visit will begin with a presentation explaining the role of raptors in the environment, their unique characteristics, and the function of the center. The public will be able to view several birds at close range, and also tour the facility after the formal presentation. Learn the stories of the birds that have been rescued, rehabilitated, and released by the center.

The Chocolay Raptor Center has been open since August 2012 and has the dual mission of raptor rehabilitation and public education. This year, 61 educational presentations were given at various locations throughout the Upper Peninsula. Additionally, the center rescues 25 -30 owls, hawks, and falcons a year, and if possible the birds are rehabilitated and released at the site where they were captured. A Barred Owl will soon be released on private property, and a Great Horned Owl will be released at Al Quaal Park in Ishpeming. The Center also maintains four resident birds that are unable to be released due to disabling permanent injuries.



Chocolay Raptor Center handler Bob Jensen displays “Erik the Red” for a recent educational presentation. Erik is a permanently disabled Red-tailed Hawk, housed and trained at the Center.
(photo by Jerry Maynard, Chocolay Raptor Center)

Evening Programs

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Library. Meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. and end around 8:30. For information on programs call 226-6749.

April 8, 2015 – “Spring Birding in the Lower Peninsula”

Presenter: Beth Olson

Beth Olson has traveled to the Lower Peninsula for spring migration since 2011 and will share photos of birds and scenery from her favorite Lower Peninsula birding spots. One of her yearly destinations is Tawas Point, well-known for its concentration of migrating warblers, raptors and shorebirds. Join us to learn more about birding opportunities in the Lower Peninsula and to see some delightful photography.

NOTE: This program replaces the previously-scheduled “Peninsula Point Bird Survey”

No evening programs for May, June, July, August. Our next evening program will be September, 9, 2015.

Field Trip to Peninsula Point (tip of the Stonington Peninsula)

Peninsula Point is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration, and hundreds of neo-tropical songbirds like warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and thrushes are readily found each year. Often the marshy beach can be covered in shorebirds with uncommon migrants like Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot and Piping Plover. White Pelicans are a near daily sight in May. Some of the more notable species seen in recent years include Hudsonian Godwit, Western Kingbird, Connecticut, Worm-eating and Hooded Warblers, Dickcissel, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Summer Tanager and Orchard Oriole.

Date: Sunday, May 24th

Time: all-day, but plan to arrive at dawn for the best viewing. Members of the club will be on-hand to assist in viewing and identification.

Picnic: mid-day cookout in the picnic area – bring your own food and beverages.

Transportation: Individual cars, or individually arranged car pools.

Driving Instructions: From US Highway 2 proceed 2.8 miles east from Rapid River; take the exit towards Stonington and travel south on County Road 513. Follow CR 513 for 17.7 miles to the tip of the peninsula, where you will find the Peninsula Point Lighthouse.

Information: Contact Beth Olson (phone: 906-360-4336 or email tolson@chartermi.net)

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2013-2014

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

Name (or names) _____

Address _____

City, State and Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

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

Membership fees (please check one)

_____ Regular (Individual and Family) Annual - \$15.00 _____ Student - \$5.00

How would you like to receive your newsletter? (check one) _____ e-mail or _____ post.

Additional donations:

\$ _____ General Expenses for club projects

\$ _____ Research Grant to fund birding research in the Upper Peninsula

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
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