



# North Country Notes

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

May 2012

Greetings from the chair,

After a topsy-turvy beginning, in which April seemed to be colder than March, spring has arrived full-force in May. The annual migration count on the second Saturday of the month took place under sunny skies, with the temperature reaching up into the 60s, in stark contrast to the wind, rain, sleet, and snow of recent years. The great weather held for the following day, when we had our first Presque Isle bird walk of the year. Amazingly, 22 people showed up for the walk, and the birds did not disappoint. Our species total was 46, including a Peregrine Falcon that nabbed a Blue Jay and carried it away as we all watched.

Also in May, the hawk migration has kicked into high gear on Brockway Mountain, with hawk counter Arthur Green reporting large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks moving through, and the season total for all species combined passing the 12,000 mark. We are now into the final month of the survey season in this three-year project. To learn more about it, visit our blog at the following address:

<http://keweenawraptorsurvey.org>

Once you are there, make sure to scroll down the page a little ways and click on the Hawk Count link for daily and season totals.

In other news, the second Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas has now been published online and can be accessed at [www.mibirdatlas.org](http://www.mibirdatlas.org). The field work for the Atlas was conducted from 2002-2008. The web site features accounts for all bird species that breed in the state, along with maps and comparisons to results from the first Breeding Bird Atlas, which was conducted from 1982-1988. In addition to conducting field work, several LWAS members wrote species accounts for the Atlas. Skye Haas definitely takes the prize, as he wrote about 20 accounts. Other LWAS members who wrote species accounts include me, Zach Gayk, Scott Hickman, and Alec Lindsay. Other names you may recognize among the authors are Joe Youngman and Joe Kaplan, who have given presentations to our group, as well as our 2010 Keweenaw Raptor Survey hawk counter, Max Henschell.

Of course, the most surprising development of the past couple months was the rather drastic amount of tree cutting that took place at the Presque Isle bog walk during the first week of April. Although LWAS has provided plenty of input into the changes that are being made in the Shiras Pool area, we knew little about what was being planned for the bog and surrounding area and never expected that so many large trees would be cut. While the removal of concrete chunks and the expansion of the bog may have long-term benefits for wildlife, we feel that it would have been preferable to alter some other portion of the bog walk, such as the large meadow full of invasive weeds, rather than clear cutting the largest trees.

Several birders spoke at the city council meeting the following week to voice their disappointment with the project. By that point, the trees had all been cut, but at least the city council was made aware of the fact that there is a very active birding community in Marquette and that birders have a strong interest in how publicly owned natural areas are managed. Thanks to everyone who spoke for keeping the discussion civil in spite of your legitimate anger about what had occurred. We hope that in the future, decision makers will take birders into account, realizing that there are a lot of us, not just in Marquette but also those who travel, often from far away, to enjoy this unique and beautiful place.

It's been another successful year for LWAS. Thanks to those who have attended the meetings and field trips and contributed membership money to help keep things going. A special thanks goes out to those who helped pick up trash along County Road 480 near the Crossroads with the Boy Scouts last month. It looks much better now! It would be great if we could contribute to similar efforts in the future. Best wishes to everyone for the summer. As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, we already have some great programs planned for the fall, and we hope to see you then, if not before.

Greg Cleary--

## **Piping Plover Volunteers Needed in Grand Marais**

As of May 17 we have 3 plover nests in Grand Marais. These should all hatch in mid-June and fledge by mid-July. Because the nesting is all on private property we cannot close off the beach as they can do in Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore and Wilderness State Park. We have many people on the beach and many predators. The predators include merlins, crows, immature herring gulls, foxes, minks, etc. We try to watch the chicks as much as possible. Bill and I have a guest cabin available to volunteers who spend from 5 to 6 hours a day helping watch the chicks. This is broken up into 2 to 3 hour shifts.

We would like to have at least 2 volunteers at a time occupy our cabin so we can share the duty. We have a queen-size bed in the bedroom and a twin day-bed. The cabin has a kitchen, bathroom, sitting area, bedroom and washer and dryer. So we could handle 3 people at a time and then we could break up the shifts.

The piping plover Great Lakes population has decreased over the last two years after increasing since they were put on the Endangered Species list. Please help if you can.

Kathy Davis  
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[kdavismqt@aol.com](mailto:kdavismqt@aol.com)

## **Hawk Counting on Manitou Island**

From May 3<sup>rd</sup> to May 9<sup>th</sup>, I counted hawks on Manitou Island, which is located just off the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula. This was part of a project by Joe Youngman of Copper Country Audubon to better understand the movement of raptors through the Keweenaw. Though I had been to Manitou twice before, this visit had some novelty for me, as I was going solo and would have the entire island to myself.

The boat ride to Manitou was a bit rough, as usual, with waves two to three feet high. It was a foggy afternoon and visibility was limited. It takes about an hour and a half to make the 15-mile trip from Copper Harbor to the far end of the island. While passing through the three-mile-wide gap between the mainland and the island, the ship's captain noticed a dead bird floating on the water. It was a Sharp-shinned Hawk. I wondered what might have caused this hawk to fail in its attempt to cross this relatively short stretch of water.

When we reached Fisherman's Bay, at the east end of Manitou, Joe Youngman and Doug Welker, who had been counting hawks for the past six days on the island, launched their canoe and paddled out to unload their gear and climb aboard. The surface of the bay was choppy and the transfer was a bit tricky, but we got it done. There was little time to talk. I was given a two-way marine radio, which I was instructed to keep with me at all times in case of emergency, and I got into the canoe with my backpack. I paddled to shore, ran the canoe aground on some rocks, and waved goodbye to the boat. I then

dragged the canoe farther up onto the shore, where it would sit for the next six days until I was picked up.

Before I began the three-mile hike to the west end of the island, I couldn't resist taking a side trip to admire the flock of Turkey Vultures that were hanging around the lighthouse area. For a hawk counter, they seemed like a good omen. After snapping a couple pictures of the vultures and appreciating the silence and solitude that would be mine for the next several days, I strapped on my backpack and hiked along the north shore for an hour and a half, reaching my destination in time to have supper before dark.

For the next six days I followed a pretty similar routine: Get up around sunrise, eat a quick breakfast, load some supplies into my backpack, then make the short hike out to Fadner Point, on the extreme west end of Manitou Island, to begin my day of hawk counting. Generally I counted hawks from around quarter to seven in the morning till late in the afternoon. Evenings were mostly spent exploring other parts of the island—walking the shorelines and making some forays into the island's tangled interior, which is dominated by thick stands of balsam fir and an understory of Canada yew and mountain maple.

While counting hawks at Fadner Point during the day, I looked across three miles of water to the Keweenaw Peninsula. In between, closer to the Manitou side, there are some rocks protruding above the water, and the largest of these, Gull Rock, is topped by a small lighthouse.

There were long stretches when very few hawks were flying, and I paced back and forth just to keep warm. But most of the time there was at least a trickle of Sharp-shinned Hawks arriving or departing one at a time. Incoming sharpies often came in low and seemed oblivious to my presence, sometimes coming within about ten feet of me before reaching the safety of the trees behind me.

On several occasions, I saw sharpies attacked by Herring Gulls out over the water. Usually it was one or two gulls, and the hawk got away without too much effort. But one unlucky hawk was attacked by ten gulls. I knew the little hawk was in trouble when it stopped making progress toward the island. It then began to lose altitude, and the gulls began getting some direct hits on it with their beaks. The last I saw of the hawk, it was barely above the water and was dropping fast. I watched closely, expecting the gulls to tear the hawk apart, but instead there was nothing. The gulls dispersed as if nothing had happened. It made me wonder if perhaps the gulls were trying to kill the hawks not for food, but for sport. It could also explain what had happened to the dead Sharp-shinned Hawk that I had seen floating in the water on the way out to the island.

Fortunately, most of the hawks made it to Manitou Island without a problem. I counted 200 sharpies on the second day, along with various other species of raptors, including many Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, and the occasional Osprey or

Peregrine Falcon. But the last two days of my stay made everything that came before look like small potatoes, as I witnessed large flights of Broad-winged Hawks. On the next-to-last day, I counted 748 broad-wings flying out to the island—most of them very high in the air—and later in the day I counted 485 broad-wings flying back to the mainland.

On the final day, I could see hundreds of hawks, mostly Broad-wings, circling far away over the center of the island, looking almost like swarms of midges. Occasionally a large group of Broad-wings would break away from the others and head for the mainland, the north wind blowing them well to the south of my observation point. My Broad-wing total for the day eventually reached 1,350. At one point, I had Broad-wings flying in both directions at the same time, which made them quite challenging to count. Still, I felt pretty good about my numbers, except I'm sure I missed some that were simply too far away to be seen even with binoculars.

I had to wrap up the count at 3 PM on the last day so I could pack up my things and hike back to the east end of the island for the pickup. Thankfully, winds were light on this day, and Fisherman's Bay was flat. When the boat arrived, I paddled out to meet it and the transfer went very smoothly. A couple hours later, I was back in my car and winding my way down US-41, headed for Marquette and a return to normal life.

by Greg Cleary

## **Summer and Fall Field Trips:**

**Monthly Presque Isle Bird Walk (June through October)** Greg Cleary  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of the month from June – October* (next walk is Saturday, June 9)

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot for the Bog Walk at Presque Isle

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. The walk covers the bog, shoreline, and woods on Presque Isle and usually takes about 2 hours to complete.

**Saturday, September 8 Delta County Field Trip** – Details to be announced at a later date.

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

Meet at 7:30 AM at the parking lot on the corner of Spring and Fourth Streets.

Information: contact Skye Haas at [TheOwlRanch@gmail.com](mailto:TheOwlRanch@gmail.com)

For this field trip, it may be a good idea to bring a lunch. Bird species on this trip may include Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay and possibly some of the species from Canada: White-winged or Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll and Pine Siskin. In past years there have been other surprises on this outing such as Black-backed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak even a Northern Cardinal. All are welcome.

### **Fall Programs:**

Meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Library on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month, unless there is a scheduling conflict with the library. Programs begin at 7:00 p.m. and end around 8:30. Programs are held monthly from September through May, with the exception of December.

**September 12, 2012** – “Natural History of Southeast Asia and Tropical Ecotourism”

Presenters: Ryne and Jen Rutherford

Join Jen and Ryne on their 5 month adventure from Northern Thailand and Laos to the islands of Indonesia.

Ryne will discuss the amazing places and fauna in this diverse region and how developing countries are shaped by ecotourism.

**October 17, 2012** – 3<sup>rd</sup> *Wednesday* – “Costa Rica – Culture and Wildlife”

Presenter: Ann Joyal

Ann will discuss her February trip to Costa Rica, where she visited wildlife preserves, organic farms and handcraft enterprises. Ann will share photos of the spectacular birds, wildlife, and the varied Costa Rican landscapes including volcanic highlands, coastal lowlands, tropical rainforest and tropical dry forest.

**November 14, 2012** – Annual Membership Meeting

**Social meeting.** Bring pictures of wildlife and scenery, on discs or jump-drives, to share with members (computer & projector will be provided). Snacks are welcome. Members will vote on any business matters, including the election/approval of Board members. Information: 226-6749

## **Birding By Ear at Peninsula Point**

by Cindy Lynne

After last year’s magnificent birding at Peninsula Point, I of course wanted to go again this year. I decided to go a couple of days early, camp and possibly bird with any other “early birds”. As it was, I had a full day of Peninsula point all to myself. Having fortified myself on bird CD’s for a couple of weeks, I hoped I could ID some songs I was unsure about.

I hauled out of the tent at the crack of dawn (7:30am for me, retired) to the sound of a loud “teacher teacher”. An Ovenbird singing way too early. I have heard many Ovenbirds singing, know their song and have seen them flitting around in the underbrush on numerous occasions, but have never seen one actually singing. I started my day by deciding to track him down. It only took about half an hour of careful stalking... and my first tick, till I had a beautiful view of him singing away on a low branch. His little orange cap popping in and out of view. He didn’t even seem to mind his audience.

I drank my cold coffee from the night before, brushed my teeth, and headed down to the point. Now as a novice/casual bird watcher, I hear many songs that either I don’t know or am unsure about, so I decided to track them all down. (That was how I identified my first Winter Wren). The Black-throated green Warbler and White-throated Sparrow....easy. Blue Jay, check, Robin, check; Crow, check. That one just sounded like a Scarlet Tanager, but just to make sure...YES! Check. The

“Robin with a sore throat”, and what a glorious site it is in the morning sun. Golden-crowned Kinglets? Yes! Oh oh, what was that one? Luckily it is a bird that comes in easily to “pishing”....Redstart.

Waxwings? Yes, whole flocks of them. I love those soft looking, elegantly masked birds. Another bird; I am guessing a Gray Catbird. YES! So gray, except for that little red bum. Meow! Next singer I hear, I guess an Indigo Bunting. Often times, I will get this one mixed up with a Goldfinch, but my guess is correct. The bird of my favorite colors, the colors of the tropical oceans, the Indigo Bunting. Another song rings out that stumps me...and it is another Redstart. Then halfway down to the point I hear a song that I have no idea who it belongs to. Unfortunately, it is singing in an area of downed brush and raspberry bushes, so I have a hard getting in to find the bird. I stand as close as I can for over half an hour, the bird sings lustily and often, but I just can’t find it. Well, I will have to save that one for later.

I made it down to the point, and recognized the song of the Great-crested Flycatcher. We have a resident that nests in our yard, so I have heard this song many times, but never really had a good look. This one decided to catch flies from a low branch, in the full sun, so I had a first class view. I never realized what a beautiful bird it is: crest, yellow body, rusty tail feathers.



Great-crested Flycatcher  
photo by Beth Olson

Two Eagles flew low over the point, as two Turkey Vultures hung in the wind, barely moving, looking just like the big stunt kites I fly.

White Pelicans, Mute Swans, several species of duck, and many Killdeer were hanging out or flying by at the point.

Now what is that bird I just heard? I think it is a Tennessee Warbler, so I look him up in the ID book and go hunting. YES, I had it right! Then another one I am not sure about, and it turns out to be...another Redstart! The bird song CD's are right when they talk of the complexity and variety of the Redstart. By the time I leave the point after four days, the Redstarts will no longer fool me (until next year, of course!) I recognize what I think is a Bobolink, and yes, there they are, three of them. I haven't seen Bobolinks in many years, and am thankful for another look at these gorgeous little gems.

I hear what I think is an Oriole, and am gratified to find out that is exactly right. I had put out some huge oranges, and the orioles loved them. At one point, there was a Scarlet Tanager and Indigo Bunting sitting about a foot apart, in a beautiful white flowering cherry tree. Red, white and blue. Sweet. The day passed quickly, racking up the species and the ticks. I walked back to the mystery bird spot, and tried to find it one more time. No luck. I would have to ask the experts on the day of the picnic.

My first question to Greg Cleary on picnic day was, of course, about my mystery bird. He asked me if I knew what a Mourning Warbler sounded like, and I didn't. We walked to the "mystery spot", and my *Mourning Warbler* was singing like crazy. After that, I heard them everywhere. I tried for two more days to spot my bird, but he refused to show himself. I know I will recognize the Mourning Warbler song from now on!



Mourning Warbler  
photo by Beth Olson

Skye put his feeders up, and the hummers came flying in from all directions, sucking the feeders dry. Birds were being spotted left and right, now that a whole flock of birders had arrived for the day. Some I saw, some I didn't, but my species alone added up to 65.

On Sunday, with Skye and Louie Dombrowski, I saw my first Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and a small group of Dunlin; gorgeous birds all and a nice treat. I sat for several hours at the "drip", watching the "bathing beauties" taking dips: Redstarts, sparrows, Common Yellowthroat, Blue Jays, orioles, and a male and female Indigo Bunting, bathing together. Jeff Knoop flushed a Woodcock in the woods as we were hunting for morels. It was so very dry.....we felt very lucky to find THREE! The nights were quieter due to a lack of peepers; I think also due to the dryness in the woods. The American Toads and Gray Tree Frogs were making their voices known however.

All in all, it was a great 4 days. There were not as many birds as last year, but I truly enjoyed finding and identifying many of the birds solo. Putting the work and time in to identify a bird really imprints it in my memory. A storm rolled in Sunday evening, and I packed up my things to leave. I decided to try and see the Black Terns at Ogontz Bay on the other side of the point before I left, but when I arrived it was way too late. I stood and watched the storm roll through, lightening flashing. Here the peepers, frogs, and toads were deafening. I heard strange and spooky sounds out over the marsh; my first thought was Snipe, but when I listened to my CD on the way home, it was Pied-billed Grebes. Who knew they sang at night, and what a strange sound. I also thought I heard Swamp Sparrows singing, but do they sing in the dark?? I guess next year I will have to go hunting...or ask an expert!!! What a magical way to end a long birding weekend.

## 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



Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society