

North Country Notes



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

October 2014

First State Record Berylline Hummingbird in Grand Marais

By Gary Palmer

Late one Wednesday evening I heard a knock on my office door. Zach Gayk peered inside and casually said “I just talked to Scott Hickman, there’s apparently a Berylline Hummingbird in Grand Marais.” Not being very familiar with this species, the sheer improbability of the situation would take some time to dawn on me.

“Oh neat, maybe I’ll head over there in the morning if it sticks around” I replied.

Zach and I soon returned to our studies, but I was too curious about this bird to focus. It sure would be fun to add a second hummingbird to my Michigan list, I thought. I dug deeper, beginning with a search in the Michigan Bird Records Committee database. No results. I checked to make sure I had spelled Berylline correctly and tried again. Nothing. My pulse quickened as it dawned on me that this was a first state record!

Excitement continued to build as I dug deeper. I soon learned that this bird rarely strays from its native range through Mexico and Central America, is found in the US less than annually, and that it had apparently never been seen farther north or east than El Paso, Texas. This truly was a megararity!

Now realizing what we were dealing with, it was time to strategize for the chase the following morning. Zach, Skye, David Essian and I agreed that we needed to give ourselves the best possible chance to see this bird. This of course meant waking up at 4:00 AM to arrive in Grand Marais well before dawn.

We were first on the scene Thursday morning, joined minutes later by two cars of birders who had driven through the night from downstate for a shot at adding this unbelievable ‘tick’ to their state lists. We anxiously set up cameras and telescopes in the morning twilight, the excitement of the gathered twitchers palpable in the crisp air.

Hummingbirds generally need to feed soon upon waking in order to maintain their rapid metabolism, and other vagrant hummers have been known to feed briefly at dawn then disappear forever, so everyone expected to see this bird soon. When color began to return to the world we all tensed, eyes locked on the feeder.

As the sun peeked over the trees without a sighting a few began to grow restless. Another hour, and hypotheses of prolonged torpor after the cold night were advanced to keep hope alive. An hour later and the first birders began to depart, while others combed the nearby woods, wondering if this subtropical bird hadn’t survived an Upper Peninsula night after all. Time dragged on and before we knew it 11:00 arrived, the time we had agreed we must head home. And still no hummingbird.

This was the biggest miss yet in my birding career, and a difficult blow to take. The two-hour ride home was somber, with occasional bewilderment at what an incredible record this had been. But then after a long, weary day, came the most amazing part of this saga.

That evening as the homeowner whose feeder we spent hours staring at walked through town, she ran into a neighbor who lived a mile away and mentioned the hummingbird and the surprising ordeal which had transpired. Remarkably, the neighbor had an unusual-looking hummingbird at her feeders the entire day. And she had gotten photos. The photos quickly spread, and sure enough, it was the Berylline!

After another night of nearly no sleep from the excitement over this bird we were off again at 4:00 the next morning, thankful for a second chance! This time even more birders from downstate joined us in Grand Marais before dawn. Between the coffee and the excitement I could hardly hold my binoculars steady.

Then, with just enough light to make out movement from across the street where we stood, a hummer visited the feeder. It was too soon to say for certain, but things were looking good. A few minutes later another visit. Then another. This bird was clearly much too big to be a Ruby-throated. Soon the sun rose higher and the bird made an extended visit, allowing clear views. It was the Berylline!

The bird had electric green plumage over much of its head and neck and the long, scythe-shaped, rufous-colored wings characteristic of this species. As the day brightened the bird sparkled in the sporadic sunlight, making an appearance every 15 minutes or so for hours, much to the delight of the gathered crowd. Ultimately the Berylline was seen for six days, from September 17-22. Dozens of birders from around the state traveled to Grand Marais to take part in this unbelievable record, which amazingly was the sixth vagrant hummingbird to hit Alger County since 2008!



Berylline Hummingbird in Grand Marais. Photo by Scot Stewart



Berylline Hummingbird in Grand Marais. Photo by Scot Stewart

Thanks to our Members

By Ann Joyal

In September 2014 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society had 76 active members whose dues support our standard activities including the printing and mailing of our quarterly newsletter, and program costs such as room-rental, data-projector rental, and mileage reimbursement for speakers. In several cases, dues also helped fund the rental of films for programs.

Extra Projects: A number of our members made additional donations to help with extra club projects or expenses. These funds have allowed the club to partially fund the Peninsula Point Bird Research Project which documented bird activity during the spring migrations of 2013 and 2014. Although Peninsula Point has long been

known as a birding hotspot, little documentation has previously been done on the migration. This knowledge becomes even more important with the construction of wind-turbines on the nearby Garden Peninsula.

LWAS Avian Research Grant: In addition, the club began fund-raising for a yearly grant to help support avian research in the Upper Peninsula. These funds are kept in a separate account with the hopes of eventually being able to fund more than one research project. This year, we raised \$535 in contributions and made our first grant award of \$500 to Laurel Hill to help fund this summer's field-research on her Master's thesis: *Changes in the Population and Habitat of Spruce Grouse on the Yellow Dog Plains*. Laurel will present her results at our April 8, 2015 program.

Thanks to the following people who made extra contributions from September 2013-August 2014. Without you our projects would not have been possible:

Arnold Aho, Ron Annelin, Libby Blichfeldt, Elizabeth, Jean, and Matthew Carpenter, Priscilla Burnham and Lou Chappell, Loren and Mary Clifford, Bill and Kathy Davis, Jane Davis, Ginny Foreman, Richard Gray, Nancy Hamlin, Jim Hayward, Clyde and Debby Hecox, Mark and Joanie Hubinger, Lois Hutchings, Wendy Irish, Bill and Jan Joswiak, Ann and Fred Joyal, Keith Kepler, Jerry and Roberta Kolak, Kate Teeter and Alec Lindsay, Jerry and Suzi Maynard, Joan and Don Miller, Joanna Mitchell, Fred and Judi Mouser, Beth Olson, Tory and John Parlin, Clare and Michael Sauer, Thom Skelding, Mary and Don Snitgen, Joan and Martin Steindler, John and Carol Stuht, Tina Hall and Bruce Ventura, Cathy and Steve Waller, and Marlene Woo-Lun.

November Field Trip – Boreal Habitat of the Peshekee Grade

Our 2014 field-trip season wraps up with a November trip to the Peshekee Grade, north of Michigamme, for a look at some hard-to-find Boreal species. This traditional field trip brings a different selection of birds each year and never fails to provide a few surprises.

Saturday, November 8, 2014: PESHEKEE GRADE

Carpool: Meet in the parking lot at 4th and Spring Streets in Marquette

Time: 7:30 a.m.

For information: call 906-360-4366 or email tolson@chartermi.net

Trip leader: Gary Palmer

For this field trip, it may be a good idea to bring a lunch. Bird species 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. Dress warmly and bring some food and water.

For the latest list of field trips and programs, check our webpage at <http://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/>

Evening Programs November 2014 – April 2015

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

November 12, 2014: “Annual Membership Meeting”

Board members will be elected or confirmed at this meeting. Mostly, though, it will be a social event where members are invited to bring their photographs of birds and other nature-oriented subjects to share the audience. Please bring your photos on a CD, DVD, or small jump-drive. A computer & digital projector will be provided, and light refreshments will be served. This meeting is open to the public.

December: NO MEETING

January 8, 2015 (THURSDAY):

"Experiencing Eden: the Birds, Wildlife and Prehistoric Life of Northern Tanzania"

Presenter: Jim Hayward

Jim Hayward will share photos and commentary from his photo safari to four of Tanzania's National Parks including Tarangiri, Ngorongoro Crater, Serengeti and Rubondo Island in Lake Victoria as well as the Olduvai Gorge paleontological site.

February 11, 2015 – “Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us?” – documentary film

Presented by the U.P. Land Conservancy and the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society

This beautiful film takes the viewer on a journey through the catastrophic disappearance of honeybees and the mysterious world of the beehive by following the struggles of beekeepers, scientists and philosophers from around the world. Light refreshments will be served, and the film is 82 minutes in length. Information: 906-869-4791 or 226-6749

March 11, 2015 – “Spring Migration at Peninsula Point – Two Years of Research”

Presenters: Gary Palmer and Skye Haas

Gary Palmer and Skye Haas spent the springs of 2013 and 2014 on Peninsula Point, documenting bird species as they migrated north from Lake Michigan. Located at the tip of Delta County's Stonington Peninsula, Peninsula Point is arguably the most spectacular migration hotspot in the Upper Peninsula. Each spring, thousands of birds pass through this area, many stopping for a time to replenish their fat reserves to power the next legs of their journeys. It is clearly a crucial spot for the migration of a plethora of birds from diverse taxa, with waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds all particularly abundant.

April 8, 2015 – “Changes in Population and Habitat of Spruce Grouse on the Yellow Dog Plains.”

Presenter: Laurel Hill, 2014 LWAS Avian Research Award recipient

Laurel will discuss her research into changes in the habitat of the Yellow Dog Plains and her investigation of how these changes affect the spruce grouse population there. She will compare data collected during the summers of 2013 and 2014 to information collected in the 1980s by Professor Bill Robinson. In the last three decades the Yellow Dog Plains have seen new roads and trails, timber harvests and the development of the Eagle Mine. Assessment of the impact of these changes on the spruce grouse population is crucial information to help manage future development in the area.

For the latest list of programs, check our webpage at <http://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/>

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:

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c/o Beth Olsson
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