

North Country Notes

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



October 2018

BIRDS OF PARADISE: VISITING PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By Jeff Knoop

The large island of Papua New Guinea (PNG) has one of the richest and most varied avifauna in the world. The island is the epicenter for a unique group of birds referred to as birds-of-paradise. Of the 43 birds-of-paradise species worldwide, PNG harbors 38 of those species including 7 endemic to the island. In total, PNG has roughly 781 species of birds including 76 endemic species. Overall PNG has immense biological diversity containing an estimated 10% of the total species on the planet.

During late summer of 2018 I, and a group of 3 others, had the opportunity to visit this tropical island for 3 weeks of very successful birding. As an overview, PNG is located north of the Australian mainland (just south of the equator), The country's geography is diverse and, in many places, extremely rugged. A spine of mountains, the New Guinea Highlands, run more or less the length of the island forming a lightly populous highland region mostly covered with tropical rainforest, small plot, slash and burn agriculture with scattered tribal villages. A high percentage of the country is accessible only by foot or plane. The highest peak is Mount Wilhelm at 4,509 meters (14,793 ft). Papua New Guinea is surrounded by coral reefs and atolls and is located in the heart of the "Coral Triangle" our planets largest and biologically diverse reef ecosystems. The country is situated on the Pacific Ring-of-Fire at the point of collision of several tectonic plates. Incidentally, Papua New

Guinea is the second largest non-continental island in the world (after Greenland).

Birds-of-paradise are members of the family Paradisaeidae represented by 15 genera and 43 species native to PNG and parts of eastern Australia and Indonesia. Most species are relatively large and sexually dimorphic. Phylogenetically, birds-of-paradise are most closely related to members of the Corvid family (crows and jays). The birds-of-paradise have a variety of breeding systems, ranging from monogamy to lek-type polygamy.

Birds-of-paradise are perhaps best known for the plumage of the males particularly the highly brilliant plumage and unique feathering with highly elongated and elaborate feathers that extend from the beak, wings, tail or head. Even more peculiar, most species have evolved elaborate, ritualized mating habits. This includes using a lek-type mating system with males competing on the lek fields to attract females by building elaborate, highly decorated shrines or stick structures and adorning those shrines with a variety of "natural resources". Any and all types of materials are fair game in the competition and typical shrines contain seeds, flowers, sticks, moss, colorful berries, paper, string etc. Shortly after the courtship ritual is complete the adults abandon the decorated lek fields. After courtship is complete it is up to the female to build the

actual brood nest and raise the young although the males assist too.

Birds-of-paradise habitat ranges from dense lowland tropical forest through montane rain forest up to roughly 3,000 meters (11,700 feet). From my observations, in two trips to PNG, at least some species have the capability to use and successfully nest in secondary and/or highly disturbed rain forest. The diet of all species is dominated by fruit and to a lesser extent arthropods. Some species can live around and breed near the many small villages in the highlands of PNG.

Closely related to the birds-of-paradise are the bowerbirds, a group of twenty rather drab, stocky and short-plumed birds found in Papua New Guinea and Australia. They lack the bright and iridescent color and ornamental plumes found in the birds-of-paradise, but the lack is compensated for with the male's architectural skill. The male builds and decorates an elaborate bower, ranging from mats, stick towers, avenued chambers to tipi-roofed huts and displays it to the females.

Jeff Knoop will be presenting a program about his groups travel to PNG at the Laughing White Fish Audubon program February 13, 2019.

Our group spent about a week at a rain forest lodge called Kumul Lodge located in the PNG highlands at 2,700 meters (10,600 feet). This area receives over 500 centimeters (200 inches) and it rains virtually every afternoon. The lodge had a large feeding station stocked daily with fresh fruits of all types. Two species of birds-of-paradise (brown sickle bill, ribbon-tailed astrapia) frequently visited the station. Overall, our group encountered 12 species of birds-of-paradise while in PNG.

We were able to get great looks at the national bird of PNG (of course a bird-of-paradise): the Raggiana bird-of-paradise. We saw a nice flock of this species just outside Port Moresby, the capital of PNG in Varirata National Park. One of the larger birds-of-paradise it is spectacular with long, shaggy orangish feathers and a green, yellow and black head and a blue bill to top it off.

Overall, we tallied some 190 bird species during our 3 week stay in PNG.



Male Bowerbird has successfully attracted a female to his "home"



Raggiana Bird-of-Paradise
national bird of
Papua New
Guinea

Annual Field Trip to Michigamme Highlands (Peshekee Grade)

Each fall, the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society sponsors a field trip to the Michigamme Highlands to view boreal species and Canadian migrants. The trip explores the boreal forests along the Peshekee Grade Road and always offers interesting birding.

Date of this year's trip: November 10 (Saturday)

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

Time: 7:15 a.m.

Trip leader: Alec Olivier

For information: contact Beth Olson at tolson@chartermi.net or 906-360-4366

Everyone is welcome. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, food and water. For this field trip, it would be a good idea to pack a lunch. This is the only field trip during the year when you are guaranteed that there will be no ticks and no mosquitoes!

Bird species on this trip may include Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker and possibly some other species from Canada, such as White-winged or Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll and Pine Siskin.

LWAS Avian Research/Conservation Grant is Available

In 2014 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society instituted an Avian Research Grant of \$500, available to individuals or non-profit organizations for birding research done in the Upper Peninsula. The grant has since funded research on the Yellow Dog Plains, Peninsula Point (Stonington Peninsula), the Keweenaw Peninsula and recently in Marquette Township.

Recently, the group expanded the grant to include conservation projects that will improve birding habitat or populations. Again, the work should take place in the Upper Peninsula. Organizations or individuals are both eligible for this \$500 grant. Either a research project or a conservation project will be chosen each year.

We would like to encourage applications for this year's grant. All applications must be received by January 15, 2019 and the guidelines are posted on the Laughing Whitefish Audubon web page under the tab marked "Research/Conservation Grant"
<https://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/research-grant/>

The application process is quite simple. If you know of an individual or an organization that might be able to use this grant, please have them check out the information on our webpage – or contact an LWAS board member. THANKS!!

2018-2019 Christmas Bird Count Dates

The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place annually from December 14 – January 5 and has been in existence for 119 years, making it the longest-running wildlife census in the country. Join with other birders to collect important information that is used to assess the health of the nation's bird populations

ALL BIRDERS ARE WELCOME: Beginning birders 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 15, 2018 (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.
No advanced registration is necessary. 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.*
- **December 16, 2018 (Sunday) - AuTrain**
The compiler is Scott Hickman at suboscine@gmail.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 want to participate so that count circle coverage can be properly coordinated and communicated to all participants.
- **Gwinn** Likely to be early in January 2019. Contact Beth Olson if you are interested.
tolson@chartermi.net
- **Michigamme Highlands - Peshekee Grade (Date to be determined)**
The compiler is Gary Palmer at palmerjg@gmail.com. Gary would welcome participants in this count – please contact him if you are interested in participating and to discuss details.

- **Cedarville and Les Cheneaux (Date to be determined)**

The compiler is Elliot Nelson.

For questions, contact Elliot at elliottkarlnelson@gmail.com or at elliottne@msu.edu

About the LWAS Executive Board and Membership Meeting

The LWAS Bylaws specify that the Executive Board must consist of at least 7 members, including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer. There is no upper limit to the size of the board and currently there are nine members: Jeff Knoop (Chairperson), Amanda O'Neill (Vice-Chairperson and Program Publicity), Ann Joyal (Secretary and Treasurer), Beth Olson (newsletter and web page), Skye Haas, Jude Holloway, Alec Olivier, Gary Palmer, and Jeff Towner. Thom Skelding will be joining the board at the November 14th meeting.

We are sad to announce the departure of two former board members. Marlene Woo-Lun has recently returned to Ohio, and long-time board member Bruce Ventura has moved to Patagonia, Arizona, where his wife, Tina Hall, is working at the Tucson Audubon's Paton Center for Hummingbirds. Their thoughtful input will be greatly missed.

The Executive Board would like to encourage some additional members to join the board. There are only three to four Executive Board meetings a year, and each meeting usually lasts from about 6:30 – 8:30 in the evening. Meetings are held at Peter White Library in Marquette. Duties include planning the program schedule, suggesting field trips, planning the content of the quarterly newsletter, and supervising expenditures – including selecting a yearly LWAS Research or Conservation Grant recipient. Birding expertise is NOT a prerequisite for serving on the Board and LWAS Board members have varying degrees skill (from expert to beginner).

We would enjoy having additional Board members and would welcome new ideas and perspectives. Since there is no upper limit to the size of the board, there is no competitive voting. If you would like to join the LWAS board, please contact one of the following officers by November 12th: Jeff Knoop (knoopster77@gmail.com), Amanda O'Neill (lifeintheyoop@gmail.com), Beth Olson (tolson@chartermi.net) or Ann Joyal (ajoyal@nmu.edu). Your name will be added to the slate of Executive Board members for renewal/approval at the Membership Meeting.

This year's Membership Meeting will be on Wednesday, November 14 in the Shiras Room of Peter White Library.

The meeting will last about an hour. Please come and enjoy the excellent photography of our members and share some tasty snacks with us. *Better yet, bring some photography of your own on a jump-drive, CD, or your computer to share with the group. A computer-projector and computer will be provided.* It is a great time to interact with other members of the group.

Free Thayer Birding Software for Kids – The Young Birder Program

Any young birders or students interested in birds and nature who are enrolled in pre-K, grade school, middle school or high school can download the new version 7.7 of Thayer's Birds of North America – **for FREE**.

Just visit www.ThayerBirding.com, select the Windows or the Mac download and enter our special code:

LaughingWhitefishYoungBirder

Then click the Apply button and Free Checkout.

This amazing birding software, for Windows or Mac computers, features the 1,007 birds that have been seen in the continental United States and Canada. The software includes 6,856 color photos, 1,506 songs and calls, 552 video clips of birds in action, 700 quizzes and much, much more. Use the ID Wizard to identify unknown birds in your yard. Keep track of the birds you see. Compare any two birds side-by-side. Read all about the bird's nests, eggs, feeding habits and more.

Thayer Birding Software's founder, Peter Thayer, decided that this would be the perfect way to celebrate his 70th birthday!

"It is time to give back something to the birding community and to the millions of young birders (and potential young birders) who just need a spark to get them started on a life-long quest for knowledge about our natural world and the importance of preserving the habitat we still have. What better way than this to celebrate the year of the bird? Our goal is to give away one million free copies of the birding program to kids everywhere."

Are you the local bird expert? You soon will be!

College and grad school students, use the code STUDENT for a 50% discount. Teachers use the code TEACHER for a 50% discount.

LWAS Programs November 2018 – April 2019

- **November 14, 2018 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Annual Membership Meeting”**
ROOM: Peter White Library -Shiras Room – Upper Level
The program will begin with a SHORT business meeting and an opportunity to meet Board members and to ask questions. The remainder of the evening will be a social event with refreshments and a viewing of bird and nature-oriented photographs taken by our members. PLEASE bring your photos on a CD, DVD, or small jump-drive. A computer & digital projector will be available. All photos are welcome and we look forward to seeing the wonderful pictures our members provide.

- **December 2018:** No Program. Please consider participating in a Christmas Bird Count in your area.
- **Jan. 9, 2019 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Travels with Max and Gizmo: In Search of the U.P.”**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
PRESENTER: Steve Lindberg
In a tongue in cheek photo homage to John Steinbeck’s “Travels with Charley in Search of America,” Steve will present photos selected from his “photo-a-day” on Facebook – a sampling of the flora, fauna, landscapes and whimsy found in his backyard.
- **Feb. 13, 2019 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Birding and Traveling in Papua New Guinea”**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
PRESENTER: Jeff Knoop
On August 12 of this year Jeff Knoop and 3 friends began a 25-day journey through Papua New Guinea, looking for birds from sea-level to 10,000 ft. Join Jeff as he shares the scenery and amazing birds of this remote and exotic tropical island.
- **March 13 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m.**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
Program to be announced
- **April 10 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m.**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
Program to be announced

Thanks to Our Members for Their Extra Donations and Support

Ann Joyal, Treasurer

In September 2018 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society had 70 active members whose dues support activities such as printing and mailing our quarterly newsletter, and program costs including room-rental, data-projector rental, and mileage reimbursement for speakers.

A number of our members made additional donations to help with extra club projects or expenses. This money was used to help fund improvements to the trail at the Chocoday Bayou Nature Preserve and to purchase several small pieces of equipment used for programs. Member donations also funded the *LWAS Avian Research or Conservation Grant* which was awarded this year to Connor Gable. Connor is a Northern Michigan University biology graduate student, and the grant will help fund Connor’s graduate research project titled “Do Fungal Communities in Trees Influence Black-Capped Chickadee Nest Site Selection.”

We’d like to express our thanks to the following people who made extra contributions from September 2017-August 2018. Without your help our projects would not have been possible:

Arnold Aho, Priscilla Burnham and Lou Chappell, Bill and Kathy Davis, Ginny Foreman, Jude Holloway, Mark and Joanie Hubinger, Lois Hutchings, Ann Joyal, Keith Kepler, Jeff Knoop, Alec Lindsay and Kate Teeter, Mary Maki, Beth Olson, Tory Parlin, Ann Richardson, Thom Skelding, Mary and Don Snitgen, Martin Steindler (in memory of Joan Steindler). and Mary Turvey.

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 Olson
5 Arrowhead Dr.
Marquette, MI 49855

