

North Country Notes



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

December 2011

Greetings from the chair,

An early November snowstorm held the attendance down at our annual membership meeting, but those of us who made it (exactly a dozen, by my count) voted for the Executive Committee, which now includes Laurel Hill, who is a founding member of the Northern Parulas birding club at NMU. We're excited to have a student on our committee, as NMU students have been more involved in our group during the past few years.

Three days after the meeting, we took our annual field trip to the Peshekee Grade, where there was a foot of fresh snow on the ground—quite a contrast to the city of Marquette, where the ground was still mostly bare. Now, with snow finally covering the ground in Marquette, we look forward to the Christmas bird count on December 17th.

The big story in the weeks leading up to the count has been the irruption of Snowy Owls south of the Canadian border, as far south as Kansas and Maryland. Snowy Owls have been seen in various spots in the U.P., including Marquette, and we are hoping they stick around long enough to be counted.

This got me thinking about how often Snowy Owls have been observed during the Marquette Christmas count since it began in 1948. A check of the records revealed the following: Snowy Owls have been recorded in 19 counts, which is 30%. There have been two counts (1950 and 1959) in which two Snowy Owls were recorded; all other years in which this species was found, it was only one individual. An irruption of Snowy Owls is by no means a guarantee that we will find one on the count. The last time they invaded, about five years ago, they all disappeared before the count. In the past six years, we've only had one Snowy Owl in the Marquette count. That was in 2008, when one was spotted on top of the bank on the corner of Washington and Front at around 10:00 PM.

Another irruptive species that made a big splash this November was White-winged Crossbill. This species has been observed in only 12 Marquette Christmas counts (19%). As with Snowy Owl, this species' appearance on our count is sporadic, with no

clear upward or downward trend over the years. The high count of 218 White-winged Crossbills in 1968 will be hard to beat, and it is not likely to happen this year, considering how rapidly crossbill numbers have dwindled since they appeared in such large numbers last month.

Common Redpolls, which invaded this year along with the White-winged Crossbills, are much more likely to stick around and be counted in decent numbers. This species has appeared in 31 Marquette counts (49%). We can make it an even 50% by finding some Common Redpolls this year. It helps that redpolls use feeders, making them easier to observe. (Hoary Redpoll, by the way, is a tough one, appearing on only three counts--just under 5%--over the years.)

Pine Grosbeaks have been surprisingly scarce so far this season, but they have appeared in 33 counts (52%). Last year this species was virtually absent in the days and weeks leading up to the count, and then on count day, suddenly there were grosbeaks everywhere. We ended up with 107 of them, a new record. Keep an eye out for these robin-sized birds, which are sluggish and may be easily overlooked.

Another irruptive species that has not made much of a showing in the U.P. so far this season is Bohemian Waxwing. This species has been observed in 22 counts (35%) and has been much more frequent in recent years, appearing in 12 of the last 16 counts. As a Christmas count bird, the Bohemian Waxwing is more common than its cousin the Cedar Waxwing, which has appeared in just 14 counts (22%). With the mountain-ash berry crop less abundant than usual this year, we are likely to have a hard time finding waxwings of either species.

Every year is different, and it's always fun to watch the tallies come in and compare them to previous counts. If you're not able to participate in the Marquette count, remember that there are other Christmas counts in the area, some of which are listed inside this newsletter. Have a great holiday season, everyone!

Greg Cleary--

"TRIFECTA!" by Cynthia Lynne

Last May was a Laughing Whitefish bird-watching picnic at Peninsula Point at the end of the Stonington Peninsula. Jeff Knoop and I were considering driving down Saturday night, camping, and getting up early for the best "action". Because it was rainy and dreary, we didn't go, and Sunday dawned the same. We vacillated back and forth, to go or not to go. Jeff opted not to go, but I headed down late in the morning. I figured there wouldn't be a thing flapping.

Was I in for a surprise!

The first person I saw as I drove down the rutted, bumpy road was Greg Cleary. As I rolled down my window, my car was filled with a chorus of bird song. When I asked Greg how the birding was, he said "incredible"! I couldn't wait to park the car! The next person I saw as I drove in was Skye Haas, sitting at the side of the road in a chair with a camera, looking at me with a murderous glint in his eye. I found out later that the "morning" birders had been taking turns viewing a Connecticut Warbler hanging out at one of the feeders, and Skye was trying to get a good picture of him. I think that my payback for disturbing his effort was that I never saw the bird, although I tried for two days! Skye did forgive me, but never get between a man and his bird! (Just joking of course Skye!) I parked the car, grabbed my binoculars, and made a beeline for Greg. My plan of action was to attach myself to the good birders, and just look, listen, and learn. Within the cacophonous din of all the singing birds, I couldn't pick out one single song. No problem for Greg: warblers of every kind, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Blackpoll, Cape May, (firsts for me), Palm, Black-and-white, Black-throated green, Ovenbird, Canada, Wilson's, Mourning, Yellow, Bay-breasted, Pine, Chestnut-sided, Nashville, Parula, Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Waterthrush, and probably more that I can't remember. The day was early and already I was amazed.

As we continued on towards the flats, there were thrushes everywhere. Considering I had seen only one once before, the number of Swainson's in the underbrush was amazing! Then, out of the bushes, a Gray-cheeked popped into view and we just had to stay and watch him for quite a while. We walked out to the point with flocks of Savannah Sparrows flitting through the brush. No matter where one looked, there they were! The thrills kept coming. At one point, there were 12 male Scarlet Tanagers perched in one bare tree. BEAUTIFUL!! Goldfinches, Indigo Buntings, Cardinals and Rose-

breasted Grosbeaks shared a string of feeders.....could the colors be more incredible? At a sugar feeder, Ruby-throated Hummers by the dozens slowly drank it dry. At the orange stand, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles feasted.

When Greg left, I attached myself to Skye. There were rumors of a Western Tanager, and we kept looking. Flycatchers, kinglets, waxwings, nuthatches, woodpeckers, vireos, and one of my favorite singers the Winter Wren all grabbed our attention. Then we found him. What a lovely bird!! I had seen them before, but only out west. After watching the tanager till he flew off, we wandered down the dirt road, listening to Black-throated Blues. Then all of a sudden Ryan Laforce (another excellent birder who had been with us earlier) came running down the road at us yelling "TRIFECTA, TRIFECTA!!!!!!!" Well, the only trifecta I knew was in horse racing, and Skye took off like he was breaking from the gate! I will never forget watching Skye running down the road so fast I couldn't catch him! When I finally arrived at the gathering, I understood the excitement. There they were, a Western, Scarlet, and female Summer Tanagers. Trifecta! And I was a part of it. I think I was more excited than anyone; I had never seen that before. I spent the rest of the day dividing my time between Skye, Ryan, and the Hubingers, taking advantage of their expert birding skills. I understand the total bird count for the day was 118 species!

I did end up camping that night at the point. I watched as an incredible lightning storm came bursting in. I walked down to the point, and stood there as thunder and lightning crashed around me. I climbed the tower, and felt like John Muir as he climbed his pine tree in the storm, until I realized that I was standing on a METAL platform. I flew down that tower I can tell you, and spent the rest of the storm on the ground. As I made my way back to my vehicle, I was serenaded by what seemed like millions of spring peepers and toads. Their song was almost as loud and deafening as the birds, and I loved every minute of it. The rain picked up till it was a steady downpour, and I decided to sleep in my car. My final serenade was the patter of rain on the roof.

The following day Joe Kaplan and Louie Dombroski showed up, neither of whom I had met before, and I had a chance to bird with them. The birding skills of the people I spent two days with are just incredible. It takes a life time of dedication

to acquire these skills, and I thank each and every one of them for allowing me to tag along and share in the excitement. It was an absolutely

unforgettable experience for me..... I have already decided that NEXT year I will be spending many more nights in one of those little camp sites.

Bird List for Peninsula Point on May 22, 2011

| | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-----|------------------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 2 | Canada Goose | 12 | Blue-headed Vireo | 3 | Palm Warbler |
| 2 | Mute Swan | 6 | Philadelphia Vireo | 12 | Bay-breasted Warbler |
| 2 | American Black Duck | 30 | Red-eyed Vireo | 10 | Blackpoll Warbler |
| 3 | Mallard | 40 | Blue Jay | 6 | Black-and-white Warbler |
| 1 | Northern Shoveler | 1 | American Crow | 30 | American Redstart |
| 6 | Long-tailed Duck | 2 | Common Raven | 6 | Ovenbird |
| 4 | Common Merganser | 2 | Barn Swallow | 3 | Northern Waterthrush |
| 42 | Red-breasted Merganser | 6 | Black-capped Chickadee | 1 | Connecticut Warbler |
| 1 | Ruffed Grouse | 2 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 6 | Mourning Warbler |
| 30 | Double-crested Cormorant | 1 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 12 | Common Yellowthroat |
| 1 | Bald Eagle | 6 | House Wren | 25 | Wilson's Warbler |
| 1 | Northern Harrier | 1 | Winter Wren | 20 | Canada Warbler |
| 1 | Merlin | 1 | Marsh Wren | 1 | SUMMER TANAGER |
| 3 | Sandhill Crane | 5 | Ruby-crowned Kinglet | 50 | Scarlet Tanager |
| 2 | Black-bellied Plover | 2 | Blue-gray Gnatcatcher | 1 | WESTERN TANAGER |
| 1 | Semipalmated Plover | 2 | Eastern Bluebird | 20 | Chipping Sparrow |
| 6 | Killdeer | 4 | Veery | 9 | Clay-colored Sparrow |
| 4 | Spotted Sandpiper | 2 | Gray-cheeked Thrush | 24 | Savannah Sparrow |
| 3 | Whimbrel | 200 | Swainson's Thrush | 12 | Song Sparrow |
| 1 | Sanderling | 2 | Hermit Thrush | 8 | Lincoln's Sparrow |
| 2 | Least Sandpiper | 2 | Wood Thrush | 3 | Swamp Sparrow |
| 40 | Dunlin | 15 | American Robin | 6 | White-throated Sparrow |
| 5 | Ring-billed Gull | 6 | Gray Catbird | 12 | White-crowned Sparrow |
| 2 | Herring Gull | 4 | Brown Thrasher | 2 | Northern Cardinal |
| 10 | Common Tern | 12 | European Starling | 12 | Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| 4 | Mourning Dove | 2 | American Pipit | 10 | Indigo Bunting |
| 1 | Northern Saw-whet Owl | 30 | Cedar Waxwing | 6 | Bobolink |
| 12 | Ruby-throated Hummingbird | 2 | Golden-winged Warbler | 15 | Red-winged Blackbird |
| 1 | Red-bellied Woodpecker | 30 | Tennessee Warbler | 2 | Eastern Meadowlark |
| 1 | Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 3 | Orange-crowned Warbler | 1 | Brewer's Blackbird |
| 1 | Downy Woodpecker | 10 | Nashville Warbler | 8 | Common Grackle |
| 1 | Hairy Woodpecker | 4 | Northern Parula | 6 | Brown-headed Cowbird |
| 1 | Northern Flicker | 14 | Yellow Warbler | 2 | Orchard Oriole |
| 12 | Eastern Wood-Pewee | 40 | Chestnut-sided Warbler | 8 | Baltimore Oriole |
| | Yellow-bellied Flycatcher | | Yellow-throated Vireo | | Blackburnian Warbler |
| 10 | Alder Flycatcher | 1 | | 10 | |
| 4 | | 40 | Magnolia Warbler | 2 | Pine Warbler |
| | Least Flycatcher | | Cape May Warbler | | |
| 20 | | 6 | | 4 | Pine Siskin |
| 2 | Eastern Phoebe | 4 | Black-throated Blue Warbler | 12 | American Goldfinch |
| 1 | Great Crested Flycatcher | 12 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | | |
| 4 | Eastern Kingbird | 20 | Black-throated Green Warbler | | |



Western Tanager at Peninsula Point. (Photo by Beth Olson)

Audubon Christmas Bird Count

The Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place from December 14 – January 5 and is the longest-running wildlife census in the country, with tens of thousands of volunteers. If you would like to participate in a local count, it is usually helpful to contact the compiler in advance. Participants pay a \$5 fee which is submitted to the National Audubon Society to cover the cost of data management and publication of the results.

Below are dates for some of the Upper Peninsula Christmas Bird Counts:

Marquette – Sat. December 17 - compiler Greg Cleary at g.cleary@sbcglobal.net or 228-8781. Meet at the parking lot for Marquette's Lower Harbor at 8:00 a.m. (advanced notice not necessary). Feeder forms available from Greg or Melinda Stamp at mstamp@mstamp.net

AuTrain –Sun. December 18 - compiler Scott Hickman at suboscine@hotmail.com or 906-892-8603. If possible, please use the email address, since count information is distributed by email. Advanced notice of at least 2 days will help in coordinating the count-circle coverage.

Keweenaw Bay – Sun. December 18 - compiler Joe Kaplan commoncoast@gmail.com or 906-370-1231
Cedarville – Wed. December 21 - compiler Tina Hall phone: (days) 225-0399 ext.4012 (evenings) 225-0139. Contact Tina for more information.

Eagle Harbor – TBA- compiler Zach Gayk at zgayk@sbcglobal.net. Contact Zach for more information.

Whitefish Point – TBA – compiler Greg Cleary at g.cleary@sbcglobal.net or call 228-8781. If you are interested, contact Greg for more information

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 Tuesday of the month. However, due to scheduling conflicts at the library, we must schedule meetings for alternate Wednesdays in both January and May.

- **January 18 *** (THIRD WEDNESDAY):** "Birding on the Lake Superior Islands" presented by Joe Youngman, Copper Country Audubon
- **February 8:** "Rollers, Bee-eaters and Lions - NMU goes to Zambia!" presented by Alec Lindsay, NMU Biology Department
- **March 14:** "Wind Farm Development and its potential impacts to birds in the UP" presented by Joe Kaplan
- **April 11:** "Whitefish Point Bird Observatory" presented by Tony Janisch, Director of WPBO
- **May 2 *** (FIRST WEDNESDAY):** Birding Identification Program presented by Greg Cleary

Keweenaw Raptor Survey 2011-2012 Update

Zach Gayk

The 2011 KRS season was again a great success thanks to the diligence and skill of this year's raptor counter on Brockway Mountain—Arthur Green—and the efforts of both Copper Country Audubon of Houghton and Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society of Marquette. In the period from March 15

to June 15, Arthur logged 515 hours of observation time on Brockway Mountain in conditions ranging from heavy fog, and snow to black fly "clouds." During this period, Arthur and supplemental observers recorded 14,000 raptors moving east toward the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula.

Although the season started rather slow in March and April, we recorded almost 4500 more raptors this season than those seen in the 2010 season by KRS counter Max Henschell. Obviously it is a bit premature to start analyzing the trends between years, as we still have the 2012 season to go. One interesting note however, is that during both years of the project the season high count has occurred in the first week of May: 2507 raptors recorded on May 5, 2011 and 1485 raptors recorded on May 1, 2010. It is no secret that the bulk of these peak flight days are composed of Broad-winged Hawks, comprising 64% of the total birds recorded that day in 2011 and 67% in 2010.

In 2011, Arthur recorded 17 species of raptors overall, including a Black Vulture that was new for the count, four Swainson's Hawks (7 recorded in 2010), and 9346 Broad-winged Hawks total (compared to 4905 in 2010). Why was the 2011 season so different from 2010? Well, it is actually quite hard to say at this point because we have only two years of data to compare and either year could have been an atypical one. Based on some previous, but probably less systematic studies done on Brockway in the past, it seems that a season total of around 10,000--15,000 raptors may be expected in a season, but none of us know for sure at this point. The Keweenaw Raptor Survey is not finished yet and we have one more season in which

to carefully gather data: the 2012 season. For a much more detailed look at both the 2011 and 2010 count data, please visit Brockway Mountain's Hawkcount page at: <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=699>.

We are currently finalizing the count arrangements for 2012, but one thing we still need to do is allocate funding for the project. Although we have received a grant from the UP Community Foundation, and funding from the Hawk Migration Association of North America (through Arthur), and Michigan Audubon, we would still appreciate your support in helping to make this final year of KRS a continued success. Currently, we have roughly \$1600 yet to raise for next season, and LWAS's share of this weighs in at approximately 800 dollars. At our last committee meeting the LWAS board voted to donate \$500 dollars from the LWAS treasury to KRS, and this leaves us with a deficit of around \$300--400 dollars based on projected operating costs. Any contributions from LWAS members would be most appreciated and we thank you for your support in the past.

Please remember to follow along as the 2012 season unfolds on both the KRS website: www.keweenawraptorsurvey.org and Hawkcount.org. We envision an exciting season and hope you will come visit Brockway in mid-May to see for your self.

Keweenaw Raptor Survey

A joint venture of the Copper Country Audubon Club and the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society

Yes! I will support the Keweenaw Raptor Survey.

Enclosed with this form is a check for the following amount:

\$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$75 ___ \$100 ___ \$250 ___ Other (amount)



NOTE: This contribution is made on behalf of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society

Name: _____
 Address: Line 1 _____
 Line 2 _____
 City _____
 Zip _____
 Telephone: _____
 Email: _____

Note: Please make checks payable to *Copper Country Audubon Club* and include in the memo line "**Keweenaw Raptor Survey.**" Copper Country Audubon Club is a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, and so your gift is tax deductible.

Please mail this form with donation to:

Copper Country Audubon Club

P.O. Box 124

Houghton, Michigan 49931

Visit us online: www.keweenawraptorsurvey.org

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2011-2012

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 buying seed for the birdfeeders 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

