

North Country Notes

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



February 2019

In Search of the Beaked Whales

by Skye Haas

I have been working as a field researcher for a couple of decades now, and it has afforded me many opportunities to travel and witness fantastic birds and other amazing wildlife. From counting rivers of migrating seabirds in Monterey Bay to raptor migration through the Great Plains and here in the gentle North Woods with our plethora of breeding warblers, all these incredible experiences have left me enriched with what I like to call my Nat Geo moments, when I am actually observing wildlife and habitats I only used to dream about as a kid when watching nature documentaries.

But perhaps my best gig yet was a chance I had to join a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research team in the North Atlantic Ocean. We set sail through the gulf stream off the continental shelf about 150 miles offshore from New England and Nova Scotia. Our goal was to survey for and study the rarely seen and barely known species True's Beaked Whale. A deep sea diving species, True's Beaked Whales are shaped like a chunky dolphin, but a bit larger, ranging from 9-15 feet in length. Inhabiting far-offshore waters, for decades the species was only known to science by dead animals washed up on beaches. This enigmatic creature has been only seen by a handful of people, half of which were members of the team I joined! This team was comprised of a talented group of researchers led by NOAA Chief Scientist Danielle Cholewiak, and hailed from various universities, The Scripps Institute, and the Smithsonian. My role on the team was to survey for seabirds, a

position NOAA likes to have on any sea research voyage. Having spent several years counting seabirds on the Atlantic Coast, I jumped at the chance to join this voyage; at a month long, it would be one of my best opportunities to observe seabirds ever.

While I have been on many pelagic trips before, I had never had the chance to spend weeks on end at sea. Furthermore, virtually no pelagics get as far offshore as we did, nor do they stay so far out for such an extended period. This allowed for a multitude of observations that were pretty mind-bending, with several species not normally seen in the North Atlantic. Many days could be very slow; to make an obvious understatement—the ocean is big! Some areas were really not fertile waters for wildlife, yet other reaches teemed with cetaceans and seabirds. We regularly saw Fin, Humpback and Sperm Whales, as well as several kinds of dolphins, flying fish, sea turtles and sharks, including an amazing close passing Whale Shark!



Humpback Whale Breaching

photo by Skye Haas

The seabirding was really spectacular at times. We often had flocks of Storm-Petrels milling about the boat, including several observations of the rare White-faced Storm-Petrel. We were frequently accompanied by big numbers of Great and Cory's Shearwaters, and saw on several occasions the smaller Manx and Audubon's Shearwaters. Near Nova Scotia one day, one of our best finds of the trip was having a small Barolo Shearwater pass us by- this species has only been recorded in North American waters a handful of times! But that wasn't the only fantastic bird we had. A few Red-billed Tropicbirds and Brown Boobies were notable so far north, and one day we had a Masked Booby, likely the furthest north record of this species.



Masked Booby Photo By Skye Haas

Also thought of as rare in the north Atlantic, we had many Black-capped Petrels, with a close look one day at Trinidad Petrel, and what was clearly the best bird of the whole voyage, a critically endangered Bermuda

Petrel went by on our last day of surveys! This true rarity only numbers in the low hundreds and was thought to be extinct for three centuries, only to be rediscovered in the 1950s!

And yes, we did find many True's Beaked Whales! It took us about a week to find some, but we ended up recording about 40 individuals, and were able to collect many photographs, sound recordings, DNA samples and even attach a data recorder on one to log its movements when diving! We were lucky and able to gather more information on this species than had ever been recorded before and numerous research papers will be generated from these findings. I was recently informed that the Smithsonian will be creating a new exhibit based on our voyage- a very exciting development! Of course, all of us are already rearing to start planning the next summer's voyage- I know I'll be ready to sail the seas again!



Pomarine Jaeger Photo by Skye Haas

The Story Behind Peter White Library's Collection of Bird Carvings

By Ann Joyal

On the top floor of Peter White Public Library, next to the Shiras Room, there are two wall-length display cabinets, containing several dozen woodcarvings of birds. These are the work of long-time LWAS member, Louie Taccolini, who has been donating his carvings to the library since 2013.

I recently visited Louie to learn more about his work. He is self-taught and has been carving birds since 1982. Louie says that he uses books and magazines to help – and today there are even You-Tube videos. For the last 12 years, he has been meeting on Wednesdays with a group of 14 other wood carvers to share techniques and ideas. All of

his carvings are life-sized, and they are all species that can be seen locally or in Marquette County.

Louie has a number of catalogs from which he orders patterns and species-specific legs and eyes.



Snowy Owl carving
Photo by Ann Joyal

The legs are metal, allowing the birds to be mounted standing, perched, or even clinging to a tree trunk. He works with blocks of basswood that are cut to the dimensions of the bird he is carving. He traces a pattern onto the block of a top view and another pattern of a side view, and he cuts out the

rough outline of the bird with a bandsaw. He then goes to work with hand-held power tools to refine the shape and then spends hours hand-sanding it to perfection. Finally, he uses various woodburning tools to etch the individual feathers, the beak and other details. Last comes the meticulous job of painting, and Louie spends hours striving to get the colors and details “just right.” In fact, his Snowy Owl took over 200 hours to complete!

To me the library is a perfect place for Louie’s birds. Perhaps the exacting detail and lively poses of the carvings will inspire people to learn more about their local birds. I think Louie would be pleased if this were the result. After all, during the 38 years he taught biology at Marquette High School, he had a sign above his desk that read “You’re here to learn.”

Sunday, May 19: Field Trip to Peninsula Point- Spring Migration and Picnic!

Peninsula Point Lighthouse at the tip of the Stonington Peninsula is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration. This year, LWAS will host an all-day birding event on Sunday, May 19

Time: All day (arriving around dawn will give you the best views)

Carpooling: Please make your own arrangements for rides.

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

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)

Hundreds of neo-tropical songbirds like warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and thrushes are readily found each year along with shorter distance migrants like sparrows, jays, woodpeckers, chickadees and finches. On a good day, a birder can easily tally over 100 species including over 20 species of warblers. Some highlights from past field trips include both Summer and Western Tanagers, Hooded Warblers, Connecticut Warblers, Rose Breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, egrets, swans, terns, yellowlegs, and hundreds of Whimbrels.

Join us for some of the spring’s best birding. *A bonus of this gathering is that there will be plenty of expert birders available to help with spotting and bird-identification.*

Birding the Sky Islands of Southeast Arizona: July 24th- August 3rd

Join Skye Haas on a birding tour of Southeast Arizona, where we will be targeting the borderland specialties like Elegant Trogon, Spotted Owl, Rose-throated Becard, Mexican Chickadee, Thick-billed Kingbird and many more! Timed for the start of the monsoon season, known also as a second spring! The desert blossoms at this time and a number of species like Varied Bunting and Botteri's Sparrow initiate their breeding season, while in the high mountains the first waves of fall migrants from further north begin to appear. The mountain canyons we will be visiting, are gorgeous places with plenty of opportunity to soak in the visually stunning scenery. We will visit a variety of habitats and elevations and should tally in over 150 species of birds. In addition to the avian spectacle that is southern Arizona, this is a naturalist's playground with lots of viewing opportunities for mammals, herps, butterflies and flowers.

The tour begins with a meet and greet dinner in Tucson on the evening of the 24th. The following morning we will visit the Sonoran Desert habitat for lowland birds like Gilded Flicker and Phainopepla, then head off to the Chiricahua Mountains for a few days. This wild and beautiful country is the only spot in the US one can reliably find Mexican Chickadees! The Chiricahuas are a treasure trove of amazing birds, with Trogons, Blue-throated Hummingbirds and Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers. In the high-elevation pinelands we will look for birds including Greater Pewee and Short-tailed Hawk as well as flocks of migrant warblers like Townsend's and Hermit mixing with local breeders like Olive and Grace's. Down in the lower brushlands, rarer thrashers like Crissal and Bendire's can be found.



Elegant Trogon

We then head off to the Huachuca range with goodies like Lucifer Hummingbird, Buff-breasted (and hopefully Tufted!) Flycatchers, Red-faced and Rufous-capped Warblers and Spotted Owls as some of our targets. Next we're off to Patagonia where we will visit the Patton Center, currently run by long-time LWAS members Tina Hall and Bruce Ventura! The Patton Center is one of the best places to see Violet-crowned Hummingbirds in the US, and the hills nearby can be excellent for Montezuma Quail and Black-capped Gnatcatchers. We will also visit the rugged and exceptionally beautiful Atascosa Highlands to track down Five-striped Sparrows and Buff-collared Nightjars, both species that just barely slip over

the Mexican border into the US. We spend our final days in the Santa Rita Mountains birding the legendary Madera Canyon. Full of birds like Painted Redstart, Arizona Woodpecker, Whiskered Screech-Owl and Magnificent Hummingbirds, Madera can be another excellent spot for Trogons. After our final day of birding here, we will drive back to Tucson for a farewell dinner on August 3rd to conclude the tour.

We will be traveling by van for the duration of the tour, with lodging in hotels and birding lodges. The price of the tour includes lodging, transportation by van, breakfast and lunch and all entry fees. Not included is air fare to Arizona and evening dinners. There will be a bit of elevational hiking, with a couple of moderately strenuous hikes, but we will also be doing some easier walks, road birding as well as visiting several feeding stations, particularly for hummingbirds including rarities like Beryline and White-eared Hummingbirds. We rise early most days to beat the day's heat, though temperatures are often quite comfortable in the mountains. It can be cool when rainy and some days particularly in the lowlands will be hot and dry. We will do some evening birding to look and listen for Nightjars and Owls.

If interested, please email Skye Haas at theowlranch@gmail.com for more tour details.

LWAS Programs February 2019 – November 2019

- **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, 2018 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. “Travels in Patagonia”**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
PRESENTER: Geoff Smith
This presentation will explore Chilean Patagonia near the southern tip of South America. It is an otherworldly landscape of intense winds, ever-streaming clouds, and changing weather. Highlights of our trip were bird and wildlife viewing in the Patagonian Steppe grasslands, hiking in the glorious mountain and glacier terrain of Torres de Paine National Park, glimpsing a puma and fly-fishing for brwn trout. Join us for this unforgettable trip below 50 degrees south latitude.
 - **April 10 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Wildlife Spectacular of Tanzania, East Africa”**
ROOM: Peter White Library Community Room
PRESENTER: Jeff Towner
Jeff and his son Daniel spent three weeks in October in northern Tanzania and the islands of Pemba and Zanzibar. His presentation will focus on the mammals and birds of Tanzania, as well as some of the wildlife conservation challenges in Africa.
- THERE ARE NO PRESENTATIONS FROM MAY – AUGUST*
- **September 11 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Birding Adventures in Spain”**
ROOM: Peter White Community Room
PRESENTERS: Mark and Joanie Hubinger
Mark and Joanie spent close to a month in Spain in the spring of 2018, traveling from Madrid to the Pyrenees, the Mediterranean coast and finally ending up in Barcelona. Their presentation will cover the birds and natural landscape of Spain, plus the cultural and historic aspects of Madrid and Barcelona.
 - **October 9 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. “Travels with Max and Gizmo: In Search of the U.P.”**
ROOM: Peter White Community Room
PRESENTER: Steve Lindberg
This program is repeated at the request of many people who missed Steve’s original presentation in January due to bad weather. Steve will present photos selected from his “photo-a-day” on Facebook – a seasonal sampling of the animals and scenery found around his neighborhood in Marquette. Steve addss that this program may be edited to include some new material and deletions of some original photographs.
 - **November 13 (Wed.) 7:00 p.m. Annual Membership Meeting**
ROOM: Peter White Community Room
This is an informal social event where members are invited to bring digital photographs of birds and other nature-oriented subjects to share with the audience. Light refreshments will be served. There will be a brief business meeting before the program.

Saturday June 8 There will be an outing to Kate's Grade. Watch the LWAS website for further details. <https://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/>

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.
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