



North Country Notes

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

March 2011

Greetings from the chair,

It's no coincidence that our January and February programs both had a heavy emphasis on photography. Digital cameras have made photography much easier for those who may have only dabbled in it previously, and computers have made photo sharing quick and easy. J.D. Phillips, who provided our February program, approached the subject of photography as an amateur who has obviously become quite good at it. In January, Scot Stewart provided a program on local birding, and as with any program by Scot, there were lots of great pictures, all of which were taken with pre-digital technology. The talent that we have right here in Marquette is really quite remarkable.

With 2011 just getting underway, LWAS is making plans. The Executive Committee met in late January and came up with a list of field trips, which can be found in this newsletter. Meanwhile, our group continues in its advisory role with the Shiras Pool project. Plans for this project are really taking shape now, as will be explained below. But the first task on hand is the Keweenaw Raptor Survey (KRS), which is gearing up for its second season.

The big news with KRS is that a hawk counter has been hired. We are excited to welcome Arthur Green of Bedford, New York, to the project. For the past two years, Arthur has organized the Chestnut Ridge Hawkwatch in Bedford, and he is a board member of the Bedford Audubon Society and the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). He is an experienced hawk counter, and our project is of special interest to him because it is "experimental" in nature, i.e., it documents migration at a site that has been studied very little up till now.

Arthur will be passing through Marquette on his way to Copper Harbor. He will begin counting hawks on Brockway Mountain on March 15th. He will spend three months living in a neat little cabin at the Pines resort in Copper Harbor, just as Max did last year, and ascending the mountain each day to count hawks. This will be Arthur's first visit to the U.P., so we will be sure to give him a warm welcome.

The count has been less difficult to organize in its second year. Last year we had to establish a protocol and figure out various logistical problems, some of which we did not foresee. This year we are able to repeat what worked last year while tweaking those things that did not work so well.

Meanwhile, back here in Marquette, the Shiras Pool project is moving ahead. Members of Moosewood Nature Center have been meeting with an engineer, Mike Pond, to discuss the details of how the concrete will be removed and how the bottom of the pond will be sloped. I have been able to attend most of these meetings. Scot Stewart of Moosewood has noted the project can be divided into three main parts: conversion of the pool to a pond, developing the surrounding wetlands with a demonstration bog and sedge-leatherleaf-bog rosemary community, and developing the uplands with a conifer corridor, fruit trees, and butterfly-hummingbird garden.

As plans solidify, grants are being sought to help fund the project, and the plans can then be taken to contractors to get their possible approaches to removing concrete and estimates for the work. Guidelines include creating an expanded emergent wetland suitable for sedges and wetland shrubs, maintaining the stairway to the slide as an observation tower (though the slide itself will be removed), and building a walkway around the pond, including a boardwalk over the wetlands. We are hoping that ground can be broken on this project this summer, and LWAS members will be kept up to date on any opportunities to help out with the effort.

Greg Cleary--

Christmas Bird Count Highlights, 2010-2011

This winter, as usual, six Christmas bird counts took place our area, nearly spanning the entirety of the count period (Dec. 14th to Jan. 5th):

Keweenaw Bay Dec. 14th
Marquette Dec. 18th
Au Train Dec. 19th
Whitefish Point Dec. 31st
Eagle Harbor Jan. 2nd
Gwinn Jan. 3rd

Participation continues to be quite strong overall. Not surprisingly, the Marquette count had the highest number of participants by far, with 28 individuals contributing to the effort.

The count period began with an astounding rarity, as counters at Keweenaw Bay found two Ross's Gulls flying out over Lake Superior on December 14th. This was the first state record for this species, and quite possibly the first time that two Ross's Gulls have been observed together in the lower 48 states. Such a find may cause one to wonder how many rare birds are out there waiting to be discovered. By prompting us to spend large chunks of time in the field during a season when we normally spend so much time indoors, Christmas counts often yield some of the best finds of the year.

The Keweenaw Bay count is quite new, having begun in 2005, so new species are still being added at a high rate. This year's new species included the following, most of which would be excellent finds for any of the counts in our area: Black Scoter, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Ross's Gull, Great Horned Owl, and White-throated Sparrow. Other nice finds in and around the bay included White-winged Scoter (2), Rough-legged Hawk, and American Tree Sparrow. The only winter finch observed on the count was Pine Grosbeak (9).

Four days later, birders in the Marquette count circle tallied 107 Pine Grosbeaks, breaking the previous record of 105 set in 2001.

(Of the six counts in our area, the only one that failed to record Pine Grosbeak was the Eagle Harbor Count, which was conducted in snowy, windy conditions.) The Marquette count yielded a rarity of its own--a Western Grebe in the Upper Harbor. This was a first for our count, and a tremendous find here at any season. The species count of 51 tied our record, and in addition to Pine Grosbeak, we had high counts for the following species: Common Goldeneye (210), Hooded Merganser (6), Red-breasted Merganser (36, breaking the previous record of 8), Rock Pigeon (392, hooray!), Pileated Woodpecker (17), Golden-crowned Kinglet (25), and Northern Cardinal (11).

Another rare bird that turned up this year was Great Gray Owl, which was found on the Whitefish Point count. This was also the only count in which Hoary Redpoll was recorded, with a total of three individuals. Boreal Chickadee was another unique find on the Whitefish Point count this year, while Gray Jay was observed only on the Gwinn count (3 individuals). These birds are always at a premium on Christmas counts, as most count circles, being centered in towns and/or near shorelines, contain little or no boreal habitat. It would not be surprising if these were the only observations of Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee in the entire state this year during the Christmas count season.

Another surprising find this year was a Killdeer on the Eagle Harbor count, and a potentially interesting find was the first-ever House Finch on the Gwinn count. Is this species going to colonize Gwinn? If that was going to happen, it seems like it would've happened by now, but you never know. Quirky discoveries such as these give us all the more reason to look forward to next year.

Greg Cleary--



A Rare Visitor to the Upper Peninsula

Female King Eider first found by Scott Hickman at the west end of Munising Bay, near the ferry dock for Grand Island, late December 2010. The bird was later re-located by Skye Haas and others a few days later. This photo was taken by Skye.

International Crane Foundation annual upper Midwest Crane Count

Saturday April 16th, is the annual Sandhill Crane count, spearheaded by the International Crane Foundation. I will be this year's coordinator for Marquette county, and am looking for volunteers who can identify cranes and are familiar with their vocalizations, to spot and listen for sandhill cranes from 6:30am to 8:30am on this date. There are a number of areas that need to be covered in the county. If you have a favorite area that you have done in the past and want to do this same area, let me know as soon as possible.

If you wish to participate, please contact me (after March 9th, I will be unavailable until then) so I can mail the data sheets to you, as well as maps for those of you who are new to the count, or wish to go to a different area than you have done in the past. I will also have the forms at the next Laughing Whitefish Audubon meeting at 7pm March 9 at Peter White Library. Contact me at 906 475 5878 or email me at hugstrees4@charter.net

Thank you!!
Cynthia Lynne

LWAS Monthly Programs:

March 9: Birding on Attu Island, Alaska

Presenter: Scott Hickman

April 13: Protecting Utah's Red Rock Canyonlands Wilderness

Presenter: Clayton Doughenbaugh of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

May 11: Birding ID Program

Presenter: Greg Cleary

2011 Field Trips

Sat. May 7th Brockway Mountain Greg Cleary(g.cleary@sbcglobal.net or at 228-8781)

Join us for our fifth trip to Brockway Mountain for a day of hawk watching in one of the Midwest's premier locations for raptor migration. This is always a great day out and last year's trip coincided with the peak Broad-winged Hawk flight with a thousand Broad-wings tallied that day! Also enjoyed by many was a pair of Swainson's Hawks, a rare visitor from the western plains. Other raptors typically seen include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and both Bald & Golden Eagles. We have seen White Pelicans flying by the mountain on several occasions as well. Especially exciting is that this will be the second year we will have a hired hawk counter on Brockway as part of the Keweenaw Raptor Survey (www.Keweenawraptorsurvey.org).

This is an all day trip and we will be leaving Marquette at 6:00 AM, from our usual car pooling spot at the corner of Fourth and Spring Streets. Please be sure to bring plenty of gas money if you think you may be riding with others. Make sure to bring lunch, water, snacks, warm clothes, folding chairs, scopes, cameras, and anything else you might want. There are outhouses on top of the mountain. For those who live closer to Brockway and would like to join us, we should be arriving on Brockway around 9:00 to 9:30 AM.

Saturday, May 14th Migration Count (Contact Greg Cleary for information)

Saturday, May 21st Fumee Lake, Dickinson County (contact Greg Cleary for information)

Sun May 22nd Peninsula Point- Spring Migration & Birders Picnic!

Information contact Skye Haas (theowlranch@gmail.com) or Beth Olson (tolson@chartermi.net)

Peninsula Point Lighthouse at the tip of the Stonington Peninsula is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration in all its feathered glory! Hundreds of neotropical 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. Some days the marshy beach can be covered in shorebirds with uncommon migrants like Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot and Piping Plover are seen annually. White Pelicans are a near daily sight in May. Some of the more notable species that have been seen in recent years include Hudsonian Godwit, Western Kingbird, Connecticut, Worm-eating and Hooded Warblers, Dickcissel, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Summer Tanager and Orchard Oriole.

Birding here in mid-May is always a treat and this year, LWAS will be hosting a birders picnic on Sunday, May 22nd. This will be an all day affair, though we strongly suggest arriving at dawn or shortly after as migrants fly off Green Bay. We are still in the beginning stages of planning, but there will be a

mid-day cookout in the picnic area - a chance to meet and mingle with other birders and celebrate the wonder that is spring in the North Woods with our avian friends!

Saturday, May 28th—K.I. Sawyer Jack Pine Plains

Information: Greg Cleary (g.cleary@sbcglobal.net or 228-8781)

We will spend a morning exploring one of the most productive habitat types in the U.P., looking for open-country species such as Vesper Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Palm Warbler, Brewer’s Blackbird, Eastern Bluebird, Brown Thrasher, Sandhill Crane, Northern Harrier, Upland Sandpiper, and others. Drive time from Marquette is only about 30 minutes, and we should return by noon, so there is no need to pack a lunch. Plan to walk about 2-3 miles on dry ground.

Monthly Presque Isle Bird Walk (May through October) (Greg Cleary)

Sunday, May 15 and then every 2nd Saturday of the month from June – October

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. We always meet at 8:00 AM at the bog walk parking lot and we walk through the bog, along the shoreline, and into the woods on Presque Isle itself. The walk usually ends around 10:00 or 10:30.

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2011

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.

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

LWAS is committed to raising \$3000 of the required funding cost. Using this form will ensure that your contribution is credited to our organization. Thanks!



c/o Beth Olson

5 Arrowhead Dr.

Marquette, MI 49855